FR. JOHN CROISET, S.J.

DEVOTION TO THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS

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Father John Croiset of the Society of Jesus

DEVOTION
TO THE
SACRED HEART
OF
JESUS

(ABRIDGED)

LONDON
BURNS & LAMBERT, 17 & 18, PORTMAN STREET,
PORTMAN SQUARE
1863

AMERICA NEEDS FATIMA

Imprimatur
+ Nicholas Patrick Wiseman
Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster
May 22, 1863

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Cover Design: LilaM and Elizabeth Saracino
Book Design: Jennifer Bohdal and Marianna Laczkoskie

Printed in the United States of America

B112

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This abridged version of Fr. John Croiset's book includes parts one and two of the original work. Parts three and four are included in the unabridged version. To order a copy of the unabridged book, please contact America Needs Fatima or Canada Needs Our Lady and mention code B97.

I do not know what power these reflections may have in moving the faithful at the present day, but they have so deeply moved even the most savage and barbarous nations, that they have been heard to cry out, at the mere recital of some of these wonders: What a good God is the God of the Christians!

He is a great benefactor, and He is worthy of love! Who can help loving a God, who loves us so passionately?

These reflections, and the desire of making some return to a Savior, who loves us with so much tenderness, and of showing Him some gratitude, have filled cloisters with religious, and deserts with vast numbers of holy solitaries who dedicated and consecrated themselves to the praise and love of Jesus Christ.

—Father John Croiset, S.J.

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THE AUTHOR'S PREFACE

The deep and extraordinary interest taken by so many in the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the great fruits it has produced, and the singular esteem entertained for it, by persons of universally recognized merit, have led to the publication of this book. It is intended to instruct the faithful, and satisfy their pious desires. There might, perhaps, have been some reason to fear, at the very outset, that the mere title of Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ, while it might attract many persons to read this book, might also deter many others. Arrested by the first words, they might be led to form an inaccurate idea of the devotion. To remove this difficulty, it has been thought well to explain in the beginning, what is understood by devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ. Experience has proved, that there is no one, who, after seeing in what it consists, does not agree, that it is reasonable, solid, and most useful, for our salvation, as well as for our perfection.

In the first part are developed the motives which should attract us to this devotion. In the second are given the means of acquiring it. And since the devotion may be wholly reduced to the perfect love of Jesus Christ, especially in the Adorable Eucharist, this perfect love is treated of throughout the whole course of the work.

It is hoped that the reflections here made will help to convince many of the reasons for practicing these holy exercises, and teach them at the same time how to practice them with fruit. A portrait is then drawn of a soul that truly loves Jesus Christ, with a view of giving a true idea of real and solid piety.

Those who know the singular merit and exalted virtue of Father de la Colombière, and are aware that Almighty God especially selected him, to promote the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, will be glad to find in various parts of this book, the thoughts and sentiments of this great servant of Jesus Christ upon this devotion.

To lead Christians to the practice of this devotion, it is un-

necessary to adduce either authorities, revelations, or examples. It is enough to know, that it tends wholly to the perfect love of Jesus Christ. It would be nothing short of prevarication, were we to abstain, through fear of being considered too credulous, from pointing out the wonderful means, which Almighty God has made use of latterly, to renew the practice of this devotion amongst the faithful. It cannot be denied, without condemning the sentiments of the entire Church, that there have existed at all times, pure and chosen souls, to whom God communicates Himself intimately. Although indeed, instances of this divine condescension and familiarity are most rare, nevertheless, there is not a century that does not furnish us with examples of it in some Saint. Those who have never received such favors, says St. Teresa, have sometimes a difficulty in believing in these extraordinary gifts. (Life of St. Teresa, Chap. 26.) But they should remember, that if it be credulity to believe everything on such a subject, it is, on the other hand temerity to believe nothing. It is well here to state, that the revelations of St. Gertrude and of St. Mechtilde, which we have quoted two or three times in this book, were examined by all the learned persons, who were then in Flanders, in France, in Italy, in Germany, and in the most celebrated universities. All were unanimous in asserting that they were full of the spirit of God, and that He alone was the author of them. Learned Prelates and great Saints have esteemed and approved them. They have been cited with praise by celebrated Doctors. One of them has asserted, that, after the examination which has been made of them, he did not think, that a man of true wisdom and solid virtue, could fail to esteem them (Blosius, *Conclave animæ fidelis*, Chap. IV, De Auctoritate Revelationum).

The Spiritual Retreat of Father de la Colombière has already made many pious souls acquainted with the wonderful means which Almighty God has employed to inspire this devotion. But, the person of whom that great servant of God speaks, "to whom" he says, "Our Lord, communicates Himself most intimately," took always especial care to lead an obscure

and hidden life, though honored by God with those extraordinary graces, which we read of with admiration, in the lives of the greatest saints. We therefore exhort our readers to read the life of Sister Margaret Mary Alacoque, Religious of the Visitation, by Monseigneur Languet, Bishop of Soissons, one of the greatest and most learned Prelates that France has produced in these times. It was translated into Italian and printed at Venice. It will be seen in the person of that most virtuous virgin, that the arm of the Lord is not shortened, and that, even if it were true that the present age is (as some not very devout minds wish to persuade themselves) an age of no miracles, at all events there is not any age of the Church in which great Saints do not appear.

Part One

Motives

for the

Devotion to the

Sacred Heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Chapter I

What is meant by devotion to the Sacred Heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ and in what it consists

The particular object of this devotion is the immense love of the Son of God, which has induced Him to die for us, and to give Himself wholly to us in the Adorable Sacrament of the altar, and this, although He foresaw all the ingratitude and outrages which He was to meet within this state of a victim immolated till the end of ages; preferring rather to expose himself daily to the insults and contempt of mankind, than to fail in showing us, by the greatest of all wonders, to what an excess He loves us.

This is what has enkindled the piety and zeal of many. Reflecting on the little gratitude that is shown for such an excess of love, the little love that is felt for Jesus Christ, and the little value that is set upon His love for us, they have been unable to endure to see Him daily so ill-treated, without protesting to Him their just grief and their excessive desire to repair, as far as they can, so much ingratitude and contempt, by their ardent love, by their profound respect, and by every sort of homage in their power. It is with this intention that certain days in the year have been chosen in order to make a more special recognition of the excessive love of Jesus Christ for us in the adorable Sacrament; and at the same time, to make Him some reparation of honor for all the indignities and all the contempt which He has received, and still receives daily, in this mystery of love. And certainly, this grief at the sight of the little love shown to Jesus Christ in this adorable mystery, this intense sorrow at seeing Him so ill-treated, these practices of devotion which are suggested by love alone, and which have no other aim but to repair, as far as possible, the outrages He there endures, are, without doubt, real proofs of an ardent love for Jesus Christ, and visible signs of a just gratitude.

It is easy to see that the object and principal motive of this devotion is, as we have already said, the immense love which Jesus Christ has for men, whilst they for the most part feel only contempt, or at least indifference, for Him.

The end we have in view is, first, to acknowledge and honor, as far as we are able, by our frequent adorations, by a return of love, by our thanksgivings, and by every sort of homage, the sentiments of love and tenderness which Jesus Christ has for us, in the adorable Eucharist, where He is so little known to men, or at least, so little loved, even by those who do know Him.

In the second place, we aim at repairing, by every means possible, the insults and outrages to which His love exposed Him, in the course of His mortal life, and to which the same love exposes Him still every day, in the most holy Sacrament of the altar. So that this devotion wholly consists, properly speaking, in an ardent love of Jesus Christ, constantly residing amongst us in the adorable Eucharist, and in testifying this ardent love by our grief at seeing Him so little loved and so little honored, and by the means we take to repair this contempt and this want of love.

But as we always require, in the practice even of the most spiritual devotions, certain material and sensible objects, which, by the strong impression they make upon us, engage our attention, and thus facilitate the exercise of these devotions, the Sacred Heart of Jesus has been chosen, as the sensible object that is most worthy of our respect, and the best suited at the same time to the end we have in view in this devotion.

Indeed, even if there had been no special reason for giving to these pious practices the name of Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, it would seem that nothing could better express the peculiar character of this devotion. For it is, in fact, but an exercise of divine love. Love is its object; love is its principal motive; and love is the end at which it aims. The heart of man, says St. Thomas, is, in a certain manner, the source and seat of love. Its natural movements follow and imitate the affections of the mind, and contribute not a little, by their strength or weakness, to foment or assuage its

passions. It is on this account that the most tender sentiments of the soul are generally attributed to the heart. It is this also that makes the hearts of the Saints an object of such singular veneration.

From all that has been said, it is easy to understand what is meant by devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It means an ardent love for Jesus Christ at the remembrance of all the wonders He has wrought, to testify to His love, especially in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, which is indeed the miracle of His love. It means a lively grief at the sight of the outrages committed by men against Jesus Christ in this adorable mystery. It means an ardent desire to omit nothing in order to make reparation, in every way we can, for all these insults. This is what is understood by devotion to the Sacred Heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ. This is what it principally consists in, not exclusively, as some perhaps have supposed, in the loving and specially honoring that Heart of flesh, like our own, which forms a part of the adorable Body of Jesus Christ. Not that the Sacred Heart does not merit our adoration. It is enough to say that it is the Heart of Jesus Christ. If His Body and His precious Blood deserve all our respect, who does not see that His Sacred Heart claims our homage even more particularly? If we feel a devotion towards His Sacred Wounds, how much more powerfully should we be inflamed with devotion towards His Sacred Heart? This Divine Heart, regarded as a part of the adorable Body of Jesus Christ, is, properly speaking, the material object of this devotion. But its principle motive is nothing less than the immense love which Jesus Christ bears towards us. Now, as this love is purely spiritual, it was impossible that it could come under the cognizance of the senses. It was therefore necessary to find a symbol to express it. What more appropriate or more natural symbol of love could be found than the real Heart of Jesus?

It is for the same reason that the Church, when she wishes to give us a sensible representation of the sufferings of the Son of God, which are no less spiritual than His love, gives us the image of His Sacred Wounds. So that, as devotion to

the Sacred Wounds is, in truth, a devotion to Jesus in His sufferings, so the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is, in truth, a more affectionate and more ardent devotion towards Jesus Christ in the adorable Sacrament, in consideration of the immense love He there testifies towards us, and with the intention of making reparation for the contempt which is manifested towards it. Assuredly, the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ bears as close a relation, at least, to His love, as the Sacred Wounds bear to His sufferings. Now, if there has ever existed, in every age, so great a devotion to the Sacred Wounds of Jesus Christ, and if the Church, in her wish to inspire all her children with the love of Jesus Christ, continually places these Sacred Wounds before their eyes, how powerful necessarily must be the effect of the remembrance and representation of His Sacred Heart?

It will be seen, in the course of this work, that this devotion is not new, and that its practice is confirmed by the example of many great Saints. It has been sanctioned by various privileges. Clement X, by a Bull dated the 4th of October, 1674, granted great Indulgences to an association of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, in the Church of the Seminary at Coutances [in French Normandy], consecrated in honor of the Sacred Heart. Innocent XII granted, by a special Brief, a plenary Indulgence in favor of the devotion to the Sacred Heart.*

It is not necessary to adduce here the numerous reasons which prove the solidity of this devotion. It is enough to say that the love which Jesus Christ has for us, and of which He gives us so marvelous a proof in the adorable Eucharist, is its principal motive; that to make reparation for the contempt with which this love has been treated is the principal end to which it is directed; that the Sacred Heart of Jesus, all on fire with this love, is its sensible object, and that a most ardent and tender love for the person of Jesus Christ ought to be its fruit.

**During the pontificate of Clement XIII (1758-1769), the Pontiff acceded to the request of many dioceses, provinces, and kingdoms and allowed the feast to be celebrated with a proper Mass and Office. The devotion has in consequence rapidly spread over almost all Catholic countries.*

Chapter II

The means employed by Almighty God to promote this devotion

Father de la Colombière, of the Society of Jesus, was one of the first whom Almighty God made use of to draw the faithful to this devotion. This great Servant of God was more illustrious for his glorious character of Confessor of Jesus Christ in England, than for the distinguished post which he held of Preacher to her Royal Highness the Duchess of York, Mary of Modena, afterwards Queen of Great Britain.* He is renowned for his works, in which he unites solidity with elegance, and elegance with unction. But he is still more esteemed for his exalted virtue. He had bound himself by an express vow to aspire to it continually, and he attained to it in so short a time as to secure the admiration of all Catholics who knew him, and even of heretics. This great Servant of God conceived at once so true an idea of the solidity and importance of this devotion, and received from God such great graces by means of these holy practices, that he thought himself obliged to neglect nothing to make known this treasure, which belongs indeed to all, but which is known only to few. Let us hear what he has written on the subject himself in the Journal of his Spiritual Retreats, which he made in London, and the notes of which were published after his death.

"At the close of this Retreat," he says, "full of confidence in the mercy of God, I have resolved to procure, by every means

*In 1676, the spiritual director of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, the Jesuit Fr. Claude de la Colombière (February 2, 1641–February 15, 1682), was sent to the English Court of St. James to be Chaplain to the Duchess of York, Mary of Modena. The Duke, her husband, was the younger brother and heir-presumptive of the reigning King Charles II. As King James II of England and Ireland and VIIth of Scotland, he would become the last Catholic monarch of Great Britain until he was deposed in the Revolution of 1688. Charles II had granted the couple special permission to maintain a Catholic chapel in St. James' Palace. Thus, the heart of London became the first place in which devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was preached in public.

possible, the execution of what was prescribed to me by my Adorable Master, regarding His most precious Body in the most holy Sacrament of the altar, where I believe Him really and truly present. Full of the consolations which I receive and enjoy from the mercy of my God, though I cannot explain what they are, I have understood that Almighty God desired that I should serve Him, by procuring the accomplishment of His holy designs with regard to the devotion which He has suggested to a person to whom He communicates Himself very intimately, and for whose benefit He has been pleased to make use of my weakness. I have already inspired many persons in England with it, and I have written about it to France, and have begged a friend of mine to make it known where he is. It will be very useful there, and the number of chosen souls that are to be found in that Community makes me believe that its practice in that holy house will be very agreeable to God. Why cannot I, oh my God! be everywhere, and publish what Thou expectest from Thy servants and friends?

"Almighty God having manifested His designs to the person who, there is reason to believe, is according to His heart, from the great graces He has granted her, she consulted me regarding them, and I obliged her to put in writing what she had said to me. This I have myself written in the Journal of my Retreats, since Almighty God has deigned to make use of my weakness in the execution of this design.

"Being before the Blessed Sacrament," says this holy soul, "one day during the Octave of Corpus Christi, I received from God excessive marks of His love. As I felt moved with the desire of making Him some return and giving love for love, He said to me: 'Thou canst not make Me a better return than by doing what I have so often asked of thee.' And disclosing to me His Divine Heart, 'Behold this Heart,' He said, 'which has loved men so much, and has spared nothing, even to consuming Itself, in order to show them Its love; and in return, I receive nothing but ingratitude from the greater number through the contempt, the irreverence, the sacrileges, and the coldness shown towards Me in this Sacrament of love.

But, what is more painful to Me is, that these are hearts which are consecrated to Me. I therefore ask of thee, that the first Friday after the Octave of the Blessed Sacrament be dedicated to a particular festival in honor of My Heart, to make It a reparation of honor by an act of atonement, and by communicating on that day, in order to repair the indignities which It has received during the time of exposition on the altars; and I promise thee that my Heart shall dilate Itself to pour abundantly the influences of Its divine love upon those who shall render It this honor.'

"But, oh Lord, why dost Thou address Thyself," said this person to Him, "to so miserable a creature, to so poor a sinner, that by her unworthiness she is calculated to hinder the accomplishment of Thy design, when Thou hast so many generous souls to execute Thy desires?"

'Dost thou not know,' He said, 'that I make use of the weakest subjects to confound the strong? That it is generally in the most insignificant and the poor in spirit that I manifest My power, in order that they may attribute nothing to themselves?'

"Grant me then," I said to Him, "the means of doing what Thou commandest."

"He then added: 'Go to My servant N. and tell him from Me, that he must do all in his power to establish this devotion, and to give this satisfaction to My Divine Heart. That he must not lose courage at the difficulties he will meet with, for they will not be wanting. But he must bear in mind, that those who wholly distrust themselves, and confide entirely in me, are all-powerful.'"

Father de la Colombière was a person of very good discernment, and was not one who would believe anything lightly. But he had received too clear a proof of the exalted and solid virtue of the person that spoke to him to fear the least illusion in this matter. He therefore immediately set himself to the work which Almighty God had entrusted to him. But in order to accomplish it in the best manner that he could, he began it in his own person. He consecrated himself entirely to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. He offered to It every-

thing in himself that he thought capable of honoring and pleasing It. The extraordinary graces which he received from this practice soon confirmed him in the idea he had formed of the importance and solidity of this devotion. No sooner did he begin to meditate on the tender love which Jesus Christ entertains for us in the Blessed Sacrament, where His Sacred Heart is ever burning with love for men, and ever open to pour out upon them every kind of grace and benediction, than he felt deep grief at the thought of the horrible outrages which Jesus Christ has endured therein for so long a time from the malice of heretics, and from the extraordinary indifference which the greater number even of Catholics show for Jesus Christ in this august Sacrament.

He was deeply moved at the remembrance of this forgetfulness, this contempt, and these outrages, and he was constrained to consecrate himself anew to the Sacred Heart, by that beautiful prayer which he calls "An Offering to the Sacred Heart of Jesus." The departure of the Servant of God to England, his imprisonment, and the short time he survived his return to France, did not allow him to publish more regarding it. But God has not left His work imperfect. He himself inspired this devotion, which, as he had made known to St. Gertrude (Life of St. Gertrude, Book 4, Chap. 4), He especially reserved for these latter times, in order to arouse by these means the tepidity and sloth of the faithful. By means of a little book composed as it were by chance, without art, without study, and without design, He has inspired with this devotion even persons who had never appreciated it, and who, at one time, without knowing in what it consisted, had thrown discredit upon it. Almighty God has made use of these persons in particular to diffuse it almost universally.

Thus, we have seen this devotion happily established in less than a year. The wisest directors, Doctors, and Prelates have pronounced its eulogium. Preachers have successfully inculcated it. Chapels have been erected in honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ. Pictures of It have been painted and engraved. Altars have been raised to It. The nuns of

the Visitation, who, animated with the spirit of their holy Founder, have been the most zealous, or at least the first, in this undertaking, have had the consolation of hearing the Mass composed in honor of the Sacred Heart solemnly sung at Dijon, in the chapel which they have built to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Their example has been followed with the greatest benefit by many other nuns. This solid devotion has spread and established itself with marvelous success over almost the whole of France. It has been carried into foreign kingdoms. It has passed even beyond the seas. It has been established at Quebec and at Malta, and has already penetrated by the help of missionaries into Syria, the Indies, and even China. In a word, the universal approbation this devotion has met with, the esteem entertained for it by persons of universally recognized merit and virtue, give us reason to hope that in future Jesus Christ will be less forgotten, better served, and much more loved.

Chapter III

How just and reasonable is the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ

The reasons which compel us to love Jesus Christ are above any mere sentiment. Souls relish them according to their progress in grace. It seems as though to wish to seek the motives that should lead us to love Jesus Christ is, either to forget what we are, or to believe that we do not know who He is.

It might then appear useless to bring forward here the motives which should incline us to the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This devotion is itself an exercise of the love we ought to have for Jesus Christ. But as all men are not always in the same dispositions, and grace is not always equal in all men, I have thought it well to make at least a few reflections on the three principal motives. They should be sufficient to convince any reasonable man.

We shall show in this and in the two following chapters: 1) How just and reasonable is the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus; 2) How useful it is both for our salvation and perfection; and 3) What true sweetness there is in this devotion. In fact, whether we consider the sensible object of this devotion, which is the Sacred Heart of Jesus, or confine ourselves to the principal and spiritual object, which is the immense love of Jesus Christ for men, with what respect, gratitude, and love should we not be filled!

Section 1

The excellence of the Adorable Heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ

The Heart of Jesus is holy with the sanctity of God Himself. Hence it follows, that all the movements of His Heart, owing to the dignity of the Person from whom they proceed, are

actions of infinite price and value, for they are the actions of God Incarnate. It is therefore just that the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ should be honored with a peculiar worship. For in honoring It, we honor His Divine Person.

The veneration we bear the Saints renders their hearts so precious to us, that we look upon them as the most precious of their relics. What, then, must we think of the adorable Heart of Jesus Christ? Its claims to our love are not only higher in degree but different in kind. Where is the heart that was ever animated with dispositions so admirable, and so conformable to our true interests? Where shall we find one whose movements could be a source of so much good to us? It is in this divine Heart that all the designs of our salvation have been formed. It is through the love with which this Heart burns for us, that these same designs have been executed.

This Sacred Heart, says a great servant of God, is the seat of all virtues, the source of all benedictions, the refuge of all holy souls. The virtues which may principally be honored in It, are first, a most ardent love for God His Father, joined to a most profound respect, and the greatest humility that has ever existed; in the second place, an infinite patience in sufferings, an excessive grief for the sins which He had taken upon Himself, the confidence of a most tender Son joined to the confusion of the greatest sinner; in the third place, a most lively compassion for our miseries, an immense love for us, notwithstanding these miseries, and with all these emotions, each of which was exercised in the highest degree possible, an unalterable equanimity, proceeding from so perfect a conformity to the will of God, that it could not be disturbed by any event, however contrary it might appear to His zeal, His humility, His love itself, and all the other dispositions He possessed.

This adorable Heart is still, as far as It can be, in the same sentiments. It is, above all, burning with love for man; always open to pour out on them every sort of grace and blessing; always full of compassion for our evils; always urged by the desire to make us partakers of Its treasures, and to give Itself to us; always ready to receive us, and to be to us a refuge, a

habitation, a Paradise even in this life.

For all this, He finds nothing in the heart of man but hardness, forgetfulness, contempt, ingratitude. Are not these motives to induce Christians to honor this Sacred Heart, and to repair so many insults and outrages, by manifest proofs of their love?

Section 2

The amiable qualities which are found in the Person of Jesus Christ

No one can apply himself to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, without finding in Him everything that is amiable in creatures, whether reasonable or devoid of reason. Everyone has his own attraction to love. Some are drawn by great beauty, others by meekness. We see some who are drawn by the virtues in which they are themselves wanting, because they seem to them more admirable than those they possess. Others, again, have a greater liking for the qualities which agree with their own inclinations. Good qualities and true virtues command the love of all. But if there were on earth a person, says a great servant of God, in whom were united all motives for love, who could refuse to love him? Now, all agree that all these are to be found united, in a most excellent degree, in the adorable Person of Jesus Christ; and yet Jesus Christ is only loved by a very few.

The most celebrated beauty, says the Prophet, is nothing but a withered flower in comparison with that of our divine Savior. It appeared to me, says St. Teresa, that the sun cast upon the earth but a pale light, after I had seen in an ecstasy, some rays of the beauty of Jesus Christ. The most perfect creatures in this world are those which have the fewest defects. The most splendid qualities in men are accompanied by so many imperfections, that whilst we are attracted on one side, we are repelled on the other. Jesus Christ alone is sovereignly perfect. Everything in Him is equally amiable.

There is nothing in Him, but what ought to win all hearts to Him. In Him, we find united all the advantages of nature, all the riches of grace and of glory, all the perfections of the Divinity. We discover abysses, a boundless space as it were, and an infinite extent of greatness. In a word, this God Incarnate who loves us so tenderly, and whom men love so little, is the object of the love, the homage, the adorations and the praises of the whole Court of heaven. It is He who has supreme authority to judge men and angels. The destiny and the eternal happiness of all creatures is in His hands. His dominion extends over all nature. All spirits tremble in His presence. They are obliged to adore Him, either by a voluntary submission of love, or by the forced endurance of the effects of His justice. He reigns absolutely in the order of grace and in glory. The whole world, visible and invisible, is under His feet. Is He not, then, an object worthy of the homage of mankind? Does not this Man-God, with all His titles and all the glory He possesses, and loving us as He does, deserve that we should love Him?

But what still more powerfully attracts our love in our Divine Savior is, that He unites all these rare qualities, these magnificent titles, this eminent sovereignty, with so great a meekness and tenderness for us, that it is carried even to excess. His meekness is so amiable, that He charmed even His mortal enemies. He was led, says the Prophet (Isa. 53:7), *as a sheep to the slaughter* and He was dumb as a *lamb before his shearer*, and *he did not open His mouth.* He compares Himself sometimes to a father, who cannot contain his joy at the return of a prodigal son (Luke 15:20); sometimes to a shepherd, who, having found his sheep that was lost, puts it upon his shoulders, and calls together his friends and neighbors, that they may rejoice because he has found it (Luke 15:5-6). *Hath no man condemned thee?* He says to the adulterous woman. *Neither will I condemn thee. Go and now sin no more* (John 8:10-11). He exercises no less meekness towards us every day. It is extraordinary what precautions it is necessary to take in the world, to avoid offending a friend. Men

are so sensitive, that often a single expression of ill-humor is enough to make them forget twenty, thirty, forty years of service. A single word, spoken at an inopportune time or place, sometimes breaks the strongest friendship.

It is not so with Jesus Christ. It seems incredible, but nevertheless it is beyond dispute, that we cannot possibly have a friend more grateful than He is. We must not imagine that He is capable of breaking friendship with us for a slight ingratitude. He sees all our weaknesses, and bears with incredible goodness all the miseries of those He loves. He forgets them, and appears not to perceive them. His compassion goes so far as to give comfort to those souls who are too much afflicted at them. He does not desire that our fear of displeasing Him should go so far as to disturb us and torment our minds. He would have us avoid the smallest faults, but He does not even wish that we should be disquieted at great ones, He desires that joy, liberty and peace of heart should be the eternal portion of those that truly love Him.

The least of these qualities, in one of the great ones of the world, would be enough to win the hearts of all those under him. The mere account of any of these virtues in a prince whom we have never seen, and are never likely to see, makes an impression on our hearts, and makes him beloved, even by strangers. Jesus Christ is the only one in whom all these splendid qualities, all these virtues, and whatever we can picture to ourselves as great, excellent and amiable, are to be found united. How is it, then, that so many motives for inspiring love do not succeed in making us truly love Jesus Christ? It often requires so little in the world to gain our hearts. We give away our heart—wholly and unstintingly, and, on so many occasions,—for mere trifles. Shalt Thou alone, oh my God, have no part in it?

Can we reflect a little on these things, and not feel an ardent love of Jesus Christ? Can we fail to have at least a lively grief at loving Him so little? We owe Him our hearts, by so many titles. Can we refuse Him, then, this heart, if we add to all these titles the immense benefits with which He has presented us, and the

ardor and excessive tenderness with which He has loved and does love us still, never ceasing to give us daily manifest proofs of the immense love He has for us?

Section 3

The sensible proofs of the immense love that Jesus Christ has for us

Of all marks of love, there is none that moves the heart of men so deeply as benefits. Either because there is nothing that marks more strongly the affection of the person who loves, or because nothing is so gratifying to our nature, ever inclined, as it is, to seek its own interest, as a love which is of service to us. Jesus Christ has used this means also, in order to oblige us to love Him. He has presented us, He has loaded us with a thousand blessings, the least consideration of which far exceeds all that we can merit, hope for, or desire. All are continually receiving His benefits. All agree in acknowledging the excess of His love, of which these benefits are themselves such striking proofs. And yet, how few are there who are won over by His benefits, or feel themselves touched by His love!

By dint of hearing the Creation, the Incarnation, and the Redemption constantly spoken of, we become accustomed to these words, and to the things they signify. And yet, there is no one so unreasonable as not to be at once transported with love, for any one from whom he knew he had received the hundredth part of the least of these favors. As our soul depends much on the senses in its operations, we were naturally little moved by the thought of a purely spiritual being.

Hence it is, that, before the Incarnation of the Word, notwithstanding the prodigies wrought by Almighty God in favor of His people, there was always a greater admixture of fear in their love. But now, this God has rendered Himself, so to speak, more sensible to us, by becoming man. This Man-God has done more than all that we could possibly have

conceived, to oblige all men to love Him. Had He never formed the design to redeem us, He would have been no less holy, powerful, or happy. He has, however, had our salvation so much at heart, that it might have been supposed, seeing all that He has done, and the manner in which He has done it, that all His happiness depended upon ours. When he might have redeemed us at very little cost, He has chosen to merit for us the grace of salvation by His death, and by the most disgraceful and cruel death, the death of the Cross. When He might have applied His merits to us in a thousand ways, He has chosen the most wonderful abasement, which has astonished heaven and all nations, as the means of doing so.

All this has been done in order to move our hearts, which are naturally grateful for the least benefit, and the smallest mark of friendship. Birth under circumstances of the greatest poverty, a laborious and obscure life, a Passion loaded with insults, an infamous and painful death, are wonders that are beyond our means to comprehend, and they are all the effects of the love which Jesus has for us.

Have we ever fully understood the greatness of the benefit of our Redemption? And if so, is it possible that we should be only ordinarily grateful for such a benefit? The sin of our first Parent has, indeed, drawn down upon us great evils, and has deprived us of great benefits. But can we look upon Jesus Christ in the manger, upon the Cross, or in the Blessed Eucharist, without acknowledging that our losses have been repaired with advantage, that the blessings which we have gained by our Redemption are at least equivalent to the privileges which man enjoyed in his state of innocence?

The character of universal Redeemer is no less powerful a motive to oblige us to love Him. All were dead, says the Apostle, by the sin of Adam, and Jesus Christ has died for all. No one has been able to preserve himself from the contagion of so great an evil. The whole world has felt the effect of so powerful a remedy. Our loving Savior has given all His blood, for the infidel who knows him not, and for the heretic who

will not believe in Him, as well as for those who, whilst they believe in Him, yet refuse to love Him. How infinite is the value of His Blood! How great a Savior, and how abundant a Redemption! Jesus Christ has not been satisfied with paying the debts we had contracted. He has prevented all those which we might have contracted in future. He has paid, so to speak, in advance, before they have been incurred. To this we must add those powerful helps, those great graces, those signal favors which He heaps on faithful souls, and by which He sweetens and renders palatable everything that is bitter and painful in our existence.

My God! Didst Thou but grant us the grace to understand this excess of mercy, could it be possible that we should not be moved, and love Jesus Christ with our whole hearts? Our Blessed Savior is, indeed, most worthy of our love, for having redeemed us by so difficult a means. But is He not still more amiable, for having done so, though compelled to it only by His immense charity, and by the desire He had to oblige us to love Him, by such striking proofs of His most ardent love?

We are utterly unworthy of being redeemed at so high a price. Nevertheless, Jesus Christ Himself has so valued us, that He has spontaneously offered this excessive Redemption for us. And after all this, shall we not love Him?

But we must remember that, however great and ineffable is all that Our Lord has done for our salvation, the love which has led Him to do it is still greater than all, because it is infinite. And as if this love could not be satisfied so long as there remained a miracle it had not wrought, He institutes the adorable Sacrament of the altar, the sum of all His wonders. He truly lives with us until the end of the world. He gives Himself to us, under the appearances of bread and wine. He makes His flesh and blood the nourishment of our souls, in order to unite Himself more closely to us, or rather to unite us more closely to Him. Can we then be possessed of reason, and not be deeply moved at the mere recital of this marvel? Can we still retain any feeling of humanity, and not be all inflamed with love for Jesus Christ,

at the sight of such a benefit? A God feels tenderness for man, takes delight in him, and is solicitous about him! A God desires to unite Himself to us, and desires it to such an extent as to annihilate and immolate Himself daily, and to wish that we should feed upon Him every day, without being in the least changed, either by the indifference, the disgust, or the contempt of those who never receive Him, or by the coldness and the faults of those who receive Him often! Finally, He remains upon our altars, shut up within the Tabernacle, and this every day, and at all hours of the day. Are not these manifest proofs of the love which Jesus Christ has for us? Are they not motives powerful enough to oblige us to love Him? Ungrateful as we are, since it is for us alone that all these wonders have been wrought, what are we to think? Does not Jesus Christ, dwelling on our altars, deserve to be honored by us? Does He not show us love sufficient to merit a return of love? Woe and anathema to him, who, after all this, does not love Jesus Christ.

To say the truth, said a great servant of God, could anything shake my faith in the Blessed Eucharist, I should not doubt of the infinite power which Almighty God displays therein, but rather of the excessive love which God shows towards us. How is it that what was bread, becomes flesh, without ceasing to appear bread? How can it be that the Body of Jesus Christ is at the same time in several places? How can He be contained in an almost indivisible space? To all these wonders I have nothing to answer, but that God can do all things. But if I am asked, how can it be, that God can love a creature so weak and miserable as man, and that He can love him ardently and to such an excess, that He can love him as He has loved him? I confess that I have no other answer to give, but that this is a truth which is above my comprehension: that the love which Jesus Christ bears us, is an excessive love, an ineffable love, an incomprehensible love, a love which ought to cause admiration and surprise in every reasonable man.

I do not know what power these reflections may have

in moving the faithful at the present day. But they have so deeply moved even the most savage and barbarous nations, that they have been heard to cry out, at the mere recital of some of these wonders: What a good God is the God of the Christians! He is a great benefactor, and He is worthy of love! Who can help loving a God, who loves us so passionately? These reflections, and the desire of making some return to a Savior, who loves us with so much tenderness, and of showing Him some gratitude, have filled cloisters with religious, and deserts with vast numbers of holy solitaries who dedicated and consecrated themselves to the praise and love of Jesus Christ.

However reasonable such a mark of gratitude may be, it is not required of all. They are exhorted, not entirely to forget Jesus Christ, who has wrought the greatest of miracles, only to satisfy His excessive desire of remaining with them; to have a little more feeling for the outrages which the excessive love of Jesus Christ, for them, causes Him to endure; in fine, to be at least as grateful to Jesus Christ, who loves them so constantly, and who has done for them more wonders than they can comprehend; to be as grateful to Him as they are towards men, who are ready to sacrifice their best friends to the least of their own interests.

Now a devotion which tends only to inspire this gratitude to Jesus Christ, and is in itself, properly speaking, only a continual exercise of a perfectly grateful love, is it not a reasonable devotion? Is it not just to seek to gain some love for Jesus Christ, especially at a time when He is so little loved? There is little love for Him in the world, which has little sense of His benefits, in which His counsels are so little followed, and His maxims so greatly disparaged. There is little love for Him at a time in which there is nothing but indifference for His Person, and all the gratitude and respect which are shown Him may be generally reduced to a few prayers and ceremonies, which degenerate through custom into mere affectation, at a time when His Divine presence causes weariness, and His precious Body, disgust.

Section 4

The extreme ingratitude of men towards Jesus Christ

However incredible may appear the love which the Son of God shows us in the Adorable Eucharist, there is something else yet more surprising. It is the ingratitude with which we repay so great a love. It is marvelous, indeed, that Jesus Christ should take delight in loving man. But it is most unaccountable that man should not love Jesus Christ, and that no motive, no benefit, no excess of love can inspire him with the least feeling of gratitude. Jesus Christ may perhaps have some reason for loving men. They are His work. In them He loves His own gifts. In loving them He loves Himself. But can we have any reason for not loving Jesus Christ, for loving Him only in a small degree, for loving anything together with Him? Is there anything, then, in Him, that keeps you from Him? Has He not yet done sufficient to merit our love? Should we ever have dared to desire, or ever have been able to imagine, all that He has deigned to do, in this adorable mystery, in order to gain our hearts? And yet all this has not been enough to oblige men to have an ardent love for Jesus Christ.

What advantage has Jesus Christ derived from so wonderful an abasement? It might in some sense be said that all the other mysteries, the effects of His love, have been accompanied by circumstances so glorious, and prodigies so striking, as to show clearly, that in taking care of our interests, He did not entirely overlook His own glory. But in this most amiable Sacrament, it seems as if Jesus Christ had altogether forgotten all these advantages, and that it was His love alone that engaged Him therein. Ought not, then, so wonderful an excess of love to excite an excessive love in the hearts of all men. Alas! It is quite the contrary. It seems as though Jesus Christ would have been more loved had He loved us less. I shudder with horror, oh my God! at the mere thought of the indignities and outrages which the impiety of wicked Christians, and the fury of heretics, have committed

against this august Sacrament. With what horrible sacrileges have not our altars and our churches been profaned? With what repeated insults, impiety and infamy, has not the Body of Jesus Christ been treated? Can any Christian reflect on such impiety, without conceiving an ardent desire to repair by every possible means these cruel outrages? Is it possible, then, that he should live without giving it a thought?

If, amidst the impiety which Jesus Christ meets with at the hands of heretics, He at least were honored and ardently loved by the faithful, we might in some degree console ourselves for the outrages of the one, by the love and sincere homage of the other. But alas! Where are we to look for that crowd of adorers, earnestly bent on honoring Jesus Christ in our Churches? Are not our Churches deserted? Can there be greater coldness and indifference than that is shown towards Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament? The scanty number that are to be seen in our Churches during the greater part of the day, are they not a visible proof of the forgetfulness and want of love of almost all Christians? Those who approach our altars most frequently, familiarize themselves with these most august mysteries. It may be said, that there are priests, whose familiarity with Jesus Christ goes so far as to grow into indifference and contempt. How many amongst them are there, who, by offering Him daily, increase in love for Him? How many who celebrate these divine mysteries like persons who truly believe in them?

We perhaps think that Jesus Christ is insensible to such bad treatment. But can we ourselves think on the treatment which He receives, and be insensible, and not seek to make reparation by every means in our power? How can anyone reflect a little on these truths, and not dedicate himself wholly to the love of this Man-God, who alone has a right to the hearts of all. If we do not love Him, it must either be that we do not know Him, or that we are worse than that wicked demon spoken of in the life of St. Catherine of Genoa, who did not complain of the flames that consumed him, nor of the other pains which he endured, but only of being devoid

of love,—of that love which so many souls know nothing of, or refuse to exercise, to their eternal loss.

Let us remember, that the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament has still, as far as can be, the same sentiments It always had. It is always inflamed with love for man, always sensibly touched by our misfortunes, always urged by the desire to make us partakers of Its treasures and to give Itself to us, always disposed to receive us, and to serve as a dwelling and a paradise for us, even in this life, and above all, as a refuge at the hour of death. And, for all this, what sentiments of gratitude does He find in the hearts of men? What solicitude? What love? He loves, and He is not loved. We do not even know His love, because we do not condescend to receive the gifts by which He would show it to us, nor listen to the tender and secret declarations that He would make of it to our hearts. Is not this a motive powerful enough to touch the hearts of all who are at all reasonable, and who have some little tenderness for Jesus Christ? Our loving Savior, in instituting this Sacrament of love, foresaw clearly all the ingratitude of mankind. He felt by anticipation in His Sacred Heart, all the grief which it was to cause Him. Yet all this could not keep Him at a distance, nor prevent Him from showing us the excess of His love, in the institution of this adorable mystery.

Is it not just, amidst so much incredulity and coldness, so many profanations and outrages, that this God of love should find at least some friends of His Sacred Heart, who should be pained by the little love felt for Him, feel the injuries offered Him, be faithful and assiduous in adoring Him in the Holy Eucharist, and neglect nothing in order to repair, by their love, by their adorations, and by every kind of homage, all the outrages to which the excess of His love daily exposes Him, in this august Sacrament?

This is the end which we aim at in this devotion, in honoring this Sacred Heart, which ought to be infinitely dearer to us than our own. The act of atonement and of oblation, the visits to the Blessed Sacrament, the prayers, the Communions, and

all the other practices, tend only to render us more grateful and more faithful, by giving us an ardent love for Jesus Christ. There is no devotion, then, more just or reasonable. We shall see, in like manner, that there is no devotion more useful for our salvation and perfection.

Chapter IV

How useful this devotion is for our salvation and perfection

If Jesus Christ has wrought so many miracles to oblige us to love Him, what favors will He not do to those whom He sees anxious to show Him their gratitude and ardent love? He has loved us with tenderness, says St. Bernard, and has loaded us with gifts, when we did not love Him, when even we did not wish that He should love us. What gifts and graces will He not heap upon those who love Him, and who are so touched by seeing Him so little loved?

It has been shown clearly enough, that the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is a proof, or rather, a continual exercise of an ardent love for Jesus Christ. It consists, moreover, in the practice of the holiest exercises of our religion. It unites in itself such power and tenderness, that it obtains all things from God. Indeed, if Jesus Christ grants such great graces to those who have a devotion to the instruments of His Passion, and to His Sacred Wounds, what favors will He not bestow on those who have a tender devotion towards His Sacred Heart?

Reasons have been given in the Preface of this book, to lead any prudent man not to refuse his belief to the revelations of St. Mechtilde. In this Saint's account of a revelation she received concerning this devotion, she writes: "I saw one day, the Son of God. He held in His hands His own Heart, which was brighter than the sun, and shed rays of light from every part. It was then that our loving Savior made known to me, that, from the plenitude of that Divine Heart issue all the graces which God pours continually upon men, according to the capacity of each." The same Saint testified, shortly before her death, that having one day earnestly begged of Our Lord a great grace for a person who had asked her to do so, Jesus Christ said to her: "My child, tell the person for whom you pray, that whatever she wishes for, she must seek in My

Heart. Let her ask Me for all things in this Heart, like a son who knows no other artifice but what love suggests, and who asks of his father whatever he wants." (St. Mechtilde, *Liber spiritualis gratiæ*. Part. 4, Chap. 28)

Almighty God having made known to that person of whom we spoke in the second chapter, and for whom Father de la Colombière had so much veneration, the great graces that He had annexed to the practice of this devotion gave her to understand that it was by a last effort, so to speak, of His love for men, that He had resolved to reveal to them the treasures of His Sacred Heart, and inspire them with this devotion, which is calculated to make the love of Jesus Christ spring up in the hearts of the most insensible, and to inflame those of the least fervent. "Publish everywhere," said our loving Savior, "inspire, recommend this devotion to persons in the world, as a sure and easy means to obtain from Me a true love of God; to ecclesiastics and religious persons, as an effectual means of attaining to the perfection of their state; to those who labor for the salvation of their neighbors, as a means of touching the most obdurate souls; and finally to all the faithful, as one of the most solid and suitable devotions by which to gain the victory over the strongest passions, to restore peace and union in the most disunited families, to rid themselves of the most inveterate imperfections, to obtain a most tender and ardent love of Me, and finally to arrive in a short time, and by an easy method, at the most sublime perfection."

St. Bernard, full of these sentiments, always speaks of the Sacred Heart of Jesus as the treasury of all graces, and the inexhaustible fountain of all blessings. "Oh most sweet Jesus," he cries, "what riches dost Thou enclose in Thy Heart, and how easy is it for us to enrich ourselves, possessing as we do, in the adorable Eucharist, this infinite treasure." "In this adorable Heart," says St. Peter Damian, "we find all the weapons necessary for our defense, all the remedies suited to the cure of our diseases, all the most powerful aids against the assaults of our enemies, all the sweetest consolations to alleviate our sufferings, all the purest delights to fill our souls with

joy. "Are you afflicted? Do your enemies persecute you? Does the remembrance of your past sins trouble you? Do you feel your heart agitated by disquiet, by fear, or by passions? Come and prostrate yourself at the foot of the altar. Throw yourself, as it were, into the arms of Jesus Christ. Enter even into His Heart. He is the asylum and refuge of holy souls, and a place of shelter where our soul is in perfect security. "The Sacred Heart of Jesus," says the devout Lanspergius, "is not only the seat of all the virtues, but It is also the fountain of graces by which these virtues are acquired and preserved. Have a tender devotion to this loving Heart, which is so full of love and mercy. Through It ask for all that you wish to obtain and offer all of your actions. For this Sacred Heart is the treasury of all supernatural gifts. It is, so to speak, the way by which we unite ourselves more closely with God, and by which God communicates Himself more lovingly to us. You have in this Sacred Heart all the graces, all the virtues of which you stand in need, and you need not fear to exhaust this infinite treasure. Have recourse to It in all your necessities. Be faithful in the holy practices of a devotion so reasonable and so useful, and you will soon perceive its effects. (Lanspergius, *Shafts of Divine Love to the Sacred Heart of Jesus*).

We find also an illustrious example of this in the life of St. Mechtilde. The Son of God, in an apparition to her, commanded her ardently to love and to honor as much as possible His Sacred Heart in the Blessed Sacrament. He gave her His Heart as a pledge of His love, and as her place of refuge in life, and all her consolation in death. From that time the Saint felt within herself an extraordinary devotion towards the Sacred Heart, and received from It so many graces, that she used to say, that were she to write down all the gifts and favors she had received by means of this devotion, there would be no book, however large, that would suffice to contain them. The happy results which have been already experienced, and are still daily experienced, by those who have this devotion at heart, sufficiently confirms the sentiments of these beloved friends of God.

"I am resolved," says the author of the Interior Christian "to depend in future only on Divine Providence, without seeking either consolation or support in creatures. I should be like an infant, which, without disquiet or fear, reposes sweetly in the arms of its mother, whilst it receives from her a thousand caresses and endearments. I confess that it is thus Our Lord treats me. For, without seeking elsewhere wherewith to nourish and enrich my soul, I find in His Sacred Heart all the helps and graces of which I stand in need, and I find them in so great abundance, and I am so liberally enriched with them, that I am sometimes filled with astonishment, and dread my own negligence in receiving such great graces from this Sacred Heart with so little trouble of my own."

But, even though we could not cite as evidence in favor of this devotion either authority, or example, or special revelation, and even though Jesus Christ had not expressed Himself so clearly and so frequently on the subject, would it require much reasoning to convince a Christian that there is nothing more solid or more advantageous for our salvation and for our perfection, than a devotion which has no motive but the purest love of Jesus Christ; the end of which is to repair, as far as possible, all the indignities which Jesus Christ suffers in the adorable Eucharist, and all the practices of which tend to make Jesus Christ honored and ardently loved?

Can this adorable Savior, Who has done so much to gain the hearts of men, refuse anything to those who themselves ask of Him a place in His Heart? If Jesus Christ allows Himself to be given even to those who do not love Him, and would have Himself carried to dying persons who never condescended to visit Him in their lifetime, and who have been insensible both to the manifest marks of love which He gave them and to the cruel outrages He received in the adorable Eucharist: in fine, to persons who have perhaps themselves ill-treated Him; what will He not do for faithful servants who, sensibly touched at seeing their dear Lord so little loved, so rarely visited, so cruelly outraged, make Him atonement, from time to time, for all the insults He receives, and

neglect nothing to repair so many offenses, by their frequent visits, their adorations, their homages, and chiefly their ardent love? Is it not, then, plain that there is nothing more reasonable, more useful, than the practice of this devotion? Can it be necessary to use many words in order to persuade Christians to practice it?

Section 1

How much true sweetness there is in the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Although all exercises of devotion are capable of filling the soul with interior consolation, and all good works are accompanied by an unspeakable delight and joy, which is inseparable from the testimony of a good conscience, and which surpasses all other pleasures, it is however certain that Jesus Christ never grants so many even sensible favors as in the practices of devotion which tend only to honor Him in the most Blessed Sacrament. The lives of the Saints are filled with examples of this truth. When did a St. Francis, a St. Ignatius, a St. Teresa, a St. Philip Neri, a St. Aloysius Gonzaga, and numberless others feel their hearts more inflamed with love, than when they approached this august Sacrament? What sighs of love issued from their hearts, what sweet tears streamed from their eyes in the celebration or in the participation of this adorable mystery! With what consolations, with what torrents of delight, were they not replenished! For indeed, as Jesus Christ is nowhere more liberal than in this august Sacrament, so nowhere else does He make us feel more abundantly the sweetness of His presence. In the other mysteries He gives us His graces. In this, the first grace He bestows on us, is to give Himself really and truly to us. Joy is ever the attendant of a banquet. Jesus Christ prepares a banquet daily for us in the adorable Eucharist. Can we be surprised if He treats His friends therein with so much sweetness and love?

As the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ makes

us true and faithful adorers of Jesus Christ in the most Blessed Sacrament, so it also procures for us the greatest favors. It might be said, that Our Lord measures the singular favors He grants therein, by the number of insults He has received: and that, as there is no mystery in which He has received so many outrages, so there is none in which He fills with sweeter consolations those who neglect nothing to repair these indignities. The motive of this holy practice being so pure and so pleasing to Jesus Christ, we need not wonder if, as He is the best and holiest of all Masters, He gives so much consolation to His faithful and grateful servants, especially at a time when He meets with so little gratitude, so little true love, in those even, who make a profession of loving Him.

As it is impossible to have this devotion at heart, without having, at the same time, much love for Jesus Christ, it is very difficult to practice it without feeling that sweetness and those interior consolations, which are, for the most part, inseparable from the exercise of pure love. And as the mere sight of the wounds of Jesus Christ inspires a feeling of confidence in His mercy, the mere remembrance of His Sacred Heart inspires a joy and sweetness, that may be felt, but cannot be expressed. It is strange, that we approach Jesus Christ, and are well received by Him as often as we visit Him, and yet do not feel even the pleasure, that we ordinarily feel, when we are well received by the great ones of this world. Our little love for Jesus Christ, our great imperfections, our little faith, and a variety of other failings are the unhappy cause of this misfortune, which is far greater than we think. But as none of these failings are to be found in the practice of true devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ, we may say that these singular favors should be, as it seems, inseparable from the exercise of this devotion.

This has been happily experienced hitherto by all who have been known to be devoted to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It is still experienced every day, by those who imitate them. It is this leads us to say, that it seems as if Jesus Christ could not refuse His tenderest endearments to the friends

of His Sacred Heart. It has been observed, that those Saints who have had most devotion and tenderness towards the Sacred Heart, have all been loaded with the most signal favors. They seldom speak of the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, without using terms which show clearly the extraordinary graces and the interior sweetness with which they were replenished. "It is a good thing, it is a sweet thing," cries out St. Bernard, "to dwell in this Sacred Heart! It is enough for me," he continues, "to call to mind Thy Sacred Heart, oh sweet Jesus, to be filled with joy."

By means of this devotion did St. Gertrude and St. Mechtilde receive great favors from Jesus Christ. St. Clare asserted, that it was to the tender devotion which she bore to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, that she owed, so to speak, that extraordinary sweetness which filled her soul every time that she presented herself before the Blessed Sacrament. St. Catherine of Siena felt herself all inflamed with the love of Jesus as soon as she thought of His adorable Heart. Jesus Christ, when appearing once to St. Mechtilde, addressed to her these beautiful words: "My daughter, if you wish for the pardon of all your negligences in my service, have a tender devotion towards My Heart. For it is the treasury of all the graces, which I continually bestow upon you. It is the fountain of all those interior consolations and ineffable delights with which I replenish My faithful friends."

Father de la Colombière expressed himself in a similar manner. Although Almighty God had conducted him for a long time in the paths of the most sublime perfection, not by means of sensible consolations, but only by means of a lively faith, and very great trials, it seemed as if the Divine Spirit changed His direction of him, when He inspired him with the practice of this devotion. Hear how this Servant of God expresses himself, on this point, in one part of his Retreats: "My heart is dilated and feels delights that I can indeed taste and receive from the mercy of my God, but not explain. Thou art infinitely good, oh my God, to communicate Thyself with so much mercy to the most ungrateful of Thy creatures, and the

most unworthy of Thy servants. Be Thou blessed and praised for it eternally. I understood that God willed that I should serve Him, by procuring the fulfilment of His desires, regarding the devotion which He has suggested to a person, to whom He communicates Himself with great familiarity. Why cannot I, oh my God, be everywhere and publish what Thou requirest from Thy servants and Thy friends?" And in another place: "Cease," he cries, "cease, oh my supreme and loving Lord, to load me with Thy favors, I know how unworthy I am of them. Thou wilt accustom me to serve Thee through interest, or Thou wilt oblige me to do something extravagant. What would I not do, didst Thou not oblige me to obey my Director, in order to merit a moment of that sweetness which Thou impartest to me? Foolish man that I am! why do I say merit? Pardon me the word, my most loving Father! I am confounded by the excess of Thy goodness: I know not what I say. Can I merit the graces and ineffable consolations with which Thou preventest and replenishest me? No, my God: Thou alone, by Thy sufferings, dost obtain for me from Thy Father all the favors that I receive. Be Thou eternally blessed for them. Load me with sorrows and miseries to give me some share in Thine. I shall not believe that Thou lovest me, unless Thou wilt grant me to suffer much and for a long time."

Thus did this great man express himself in the excess of sweetness and interior consolation which he experienced, in the exercise of a tender devotion to the Sacred Heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Section 2

The devotion that the Saints have had to the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ

As the example of the Saints is at the same time a powerful motive to attract us to a devotion, which they themselves have practiced, and a particular instruction to teach us how to practice it, it is very much to the purpose to mention here

the sentiments of those who have had the greatest tenderness, and the most generous feelings, towards the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ.

St. Clare, inflamed with love for Jesus Christ, and desiring to make Him some return, thought no exercise more suitable to prove her gratitude, than to salute and adore, many times every day, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, in the most Blessed Sacrament, and by means of this devotion, as we read in her life, her soul was filled with the sweetest delight, and the most special favors.

The Prayer of St. Gertrude to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, is a proof of the esteem in which the Saint held this devotion, and the historian of her life, describing her happy death, says, that this blessed soul took its flight to Heaven, and reposed in the sanctuary of the Divinity, I mean, he adds, in the Adorable Heart of Jesus, which her Divine Spouse had opened to her, by an excess of love.

St. Mechtilde had so high a sense of this devotion, that she scarcely ever spoke but of the adorable Heart of Jesus, and of the singular favors which she received every day through this devotion. This loving Savior gave His Heart to her Himself, as a pledge of His love, and to serve her as an asylum where she might always find tranquility in life, and peace and unspeakable consolation at the hour of her death.

St. Catherine of Siena had this devotion singularly at heart. She made an entire donation of her heart to her Divine Spouse, and obtained in exchange the Heart of Jesus, protesting that in future, she neither desired to live nor to act, except according to the movements and inclinations of the Heart of Jesus Christ.

If you are anxious about my health, said St. Elzear to St. Delphina, if you desire to hear of me, often go to visit our loving Savior in the Blessed Sacrament, enter into His Sacred Heart, and you will hear of me, for you will always find me there, for there is my usual habitation.

But the words of St. Bernard not only discover to us, what were the beautiful sentiments that animated this Saint

towards the adorable Heart, they also show us that the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is not a devotion, merely of our own days.

"Oh most sweet Jesus," he cries, "what riches dost Thou contain in Thy Heart! How can it possibly be, that men have but a slight sense of the loss they suffer, by their forgetfulness and indifference towards this loving Heart? For myself," says this great Saint, "I will neglect nothing to secure and possess It. I will consecrate to it in future all my thoughts. Its sentiments and Its desires shall be mine. I will give all to acquire so precious a treasure. But why need I acquire it," he adds, "since it is truly mine? Yes, I say it with confidence, Jesus is mine, since He is my head, and does not what belongs to the head belong also to the members? This Sacred Heart, then, shall be in future the temple in which I will unceasingly adore Him, the victim that I will offer continually, the altar on which my sacrifices shall be offered, on which the same flames of divine love, with which His Heart burns, shall consume mine. In this Sacred Heart I shall find a model to regulate the movements of my own, a treasure whence to satisfy all that I owe to the divine justice, and a place of security, where, safe from shipwreck and storms, I shall say with David: I have found my heart to pray to my God (2 Kings 7:27). Yes, I have found this Heart in the adorable Eucharist. I have there found the Heart of my sovereign, my good friend, my brother. This Heart is no other than the Heart of my loving Redeemer."

After this, who shall ever hinder me from praying with confidence, and obtaining what I have asked? Let us go, my brethren, let us enter this loving Heart, never again to depart from It. "My God," he continues, "if so great consolation be felt at the mere remembrance of Thy Sacred Heart, what will it be to love it with tenderness, to enter therein and dwell there continually? Draw me entirely into this holy Heart, oh my loving Jesus, open to me this Heart which has so many attractions for me. But what! Does not Thy opened side offer me a place of entrance, and the very wound of this Sacred Heart, does it not invite me to enter therein?"

To this should be added, what the celebrated Lanspergius, well known by his works, so full of unction and solid piety, has left us on this subject. "Take great care," he says, "to excite yourself continually by frequent acts of constant devotion, to honor the loving Heart of Jesus, so full of love and mercy for you. It is by means of It, that you must ask for all you would obtain. By means of It, and in It, you must offer to the Eternal Father all that you do, for this Sacred Heart is the treasury of all supernatural gifts and graces. It is, as it were, the way by which we unite ourselves more closely to God, and by which Almighty God communicates Himself more liberally to us. I advise you, therefore, to place, wherever you pass most frequently, some devout picture, representing the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The sight of it will serve continually to remind you of your holy practices of devotion towards this adorable Heart, and will move you to love Him more and more. When you feel yourself touched with a more tender devotion, you may kiss the picture, as though you were kissing the Sacred Heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ. To this Sacred Heart, you must continually endeavor to unite your own, wishing to have no other desires or sentiments, but those of Jesus Christ, persuading yourself that His spirit and His Sacred Heart passes, so to speak, into yours, and that of two hearts there becomes only one. Appropriate to yourself from this loving Heart all the graces imaginable; you will never exhaust It.

"It is useful; nay, it is necessary to honor with singular devotion the Sacred Heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ. It is your refuge; you must fly to It in all your necessities, to draw from It the consolation and all the helps which you need. Even though all men should abandon and forget you, Jesus will be your one faithful friend. He will always keep you in His Heart. Trust in Him. Rest upon Him. Others may and will deceive you. The Sacred Heart of Jesus is the only one that loves you sincerely. He alone will never deceive you." Such is what Lanspergius says in the chapter entitled Exercise of Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

The author of the book entitled The Interior Christian, a

person of solid and exalted piety, whose work is full of the spirit of Jesus Christ, has told what was his own practice, and what a high idea he entertained of the solidity and importance of this devotion. "The Sacred Heart of Jesus," he says, in the seventh chapter of the fourth book, "is the center to which we must tend. When our soul is distracted and dissipated, we must conduct it tranquilly to the Heart of Jesus Christ, and offer to the Eternal Father the holy dispositions of this adorable Heart, and unite the little we do with what is done by Jesus Christ with infinite perfection. In this manner, whilst doing nothing ourselves, we do much by means of Jesus Christ. Let the Sacred Heart of Jesus be henceforward your Oratory, devout soul. In It, and by means of It, offer all your prayers to God the Father, if you wish them to be accepted. This is the school which you must frequent if you would learn the sublime science of God, and be instructed in its lessons so directly opposed to the maxims and false opinions of the world. This must be your treasury from which you are to draw all that you may require in order to become rich—purity, pure love, fidelity. But the most precious and the most abundant riches this treasury contains are, humiliations, sufferings, and an ardent love of the greatest poverty. The esteem and love of these things is so precious a gift that it is only to be found in its original source, the Heart of a God made man. All other hearts, however holy and noble, possess it in a greater or less degree, only as they seek it with more or less diligence in this treasury, the Heart of Jesus Christ."

In fine, it has been observed, not only that all the Saints of the Church, who have seemed to be favored with the highest graces, have had a most ardent and tender love for Jesus Christ, but also that there is not one of those who have had this exceeding love for Jesus Christ, that has not had a singular devotion to His Sacred Heart.

Those who have read the life of St. Francis of Assisi, the works of St. Thomas, and those of St. Teresa, the lives of St. Bonaventure, St. Ignatius, St. Francis Xavier, St. Philip Neri, St. Francis de Sales, and St. Aloysius Gonzaga, will have noticed

the tender devotion of these Saints towards the Heart of Jesus Christ. And to show that this is still familiar to all those chosen souls, who burn with a most fervent charity for our loving Redeemer, it will suffice to read the life of the great servant of God, Armelle Nicolas, who died not long since [1671], in the odor of sanctity. In her Life, entitled *The Triumph of Divine Love*, she says: "As soon as any affliction befell me, from creatures, I had recourse to my loving Savior, Who immediately filled me with the sweetest consolations. You would have said, that He was afraid lest I should suffer any uneasiness, so solicitous was He to console me in all my sorrows. Frequently, also, He showed me His opened Heart, that I might hide myself therein, and at the same moment, I found myself enclosed in this Sacred Heart, in such security, that all the efforts of hell seemed to me but weakness. For a length of time I could not regard myself as in any other place than in this Sacred Heart, so that I used to say to my friends, 'If you wish to find me, seek for me nowhere but in the Heart of my Divine Savior, for I shall not quit it either by day or night. This is my retreat and place of refuge against all my enemies.'"

Part Two

Means

of acquiring

Devotion to the Sacred Heart of

Our Lord Jesus Christ

Chapter V

The dispositions requisite for a tender devotion to the Sacred Heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ

All the dispositions requisite for this devotion may be reduced to four: a great horror of sin; a lively faith; a great desire to love Jesus Christ; and interior recollection.

First Disposition

A great horror of Sin

As the end of the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is nothing but a most ardent and tender love for Jesus Christ, it is clear, that to possess this devotion, we must be in the state of grace and have an extreme horror for every kind of sin. As the Sacred Heart is the fountain of purity, not only will nothing defiled be permitted to enter therein, but only what is most pure, is capable of pleasing Him. Whatever may be said or done for His love and glory, unless accompanied by innocence of life, is a dishonor to Him. The Court of Jesus Christ is composed only of the most pure souls; His Heart cannot endure sin. The smallest failing, the least stain, causes Him a sort of horror.

On the contrary, innocence and purity have ready access to the Sacred Heart. Jesus loved St. John, because, as the Church sings, his singular chastity had made him worthy of being loved with a singular love. He was loved in the highest degree, says St. Cyril of Alexandria, because he possessed extreme purity of heart. Souls that aspire to true devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ, are souls that aspire to the quality of favorites of our adorable Savior. The practice of this devotion consists, properly speaking, only in a more tender, a more familiar love of Jesus Christ than that which is

entertained for Him by the greater number of the faithful. As soon as a soul becomes careless about committing deliberate venial sins, and intends only to preserve herself from those which are mortal, she is not only in great danger of speedily losing her innocence, and the grace of God, but she cannot hope to enjoy that inexplicable sweetness with which Jesus Christ usually fills those who love Him truly and without reserve.

It is plain, then, that whoever undertakes to be truly devoted to the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ, must at the same time resolve to neglect nothing in order to acquire a purity of heart far higher than that of Christians of ordinary virtue. Indeed, the practices of this devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ are, themselves, most suitable means for acquiring this special purity.

Second Disposition

A Lively Faith

The second disposition is a lively faith. A languid faith never produces a high degree of love. The reason why Jesus Christ is so little loved, although all agree that He is worthy of love, is because the great wonders, by which He makes His love known to us, are not believed as they ought to be.

What exertions are made to give a proper reception to anyone who is thought powerful at court? What attention, what modesty, what respect, are shown in the presence of a person who is believed to be a king, even though disguised in the rags of the poorest beggar! What should we not do, then, in the presence of Jesus Christ upon our altars? What attention, what respect, but, above all, what love should we not manifest in the presence of so loving a Redeemer, our King, and our Judge, concealed under the lowly appearance of bread, did we but sincerely believe Him to be present; or at least, did we but believe it with a lively faith? The bones of a Saint inspire great respect. The mere reading of his virtues

creates in us a veneration and love for his person, because we have no doubt of the truth of what we have heard, or read. And yet, the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, who is living on our altars, even the sight of the prodigies He works in order to show us His excessive love, hardly inspire us with any respect, much less love! We never find the time long when we are with a person whom we love. How is it, then, that we find a quarter of an hour before the Blessed Sacrament so tedious? We find a play too short, though it may have lasted several hours. A Mass in which Jesus Christ is really and truly offered in sacrifice for our sins, seems to us insupportably long if it last half an hour. And yet, we know well that the play is but a fiction, the actors are not what they appear, and the whole performance is useless to us, while on the other hand, we profess to believe that in the sacrifice of our altars the self-same Victim is offered Who offered Himself on Calvary, and that nothing can be more useful to us than this most august sacrifice. (Council of Trent, Sess. XXII, Chap. 2).

Jesus Christ dwells in the midst of us in the same manner as He dwelt at Nazareth amidst His relatives. He was there without being known by them, and without working in their favor the miracles that He wrought elsewhere. Our blindness and evil dispositions prevent Him from letting us experience the wonderful operations with which He favors those whom He finds well disposed. Why is it, that we deplore so much the misfortune of the Jews? Why do we feel so much indignation at their ill treatment of our Blessed Lord, whom they refused to acknowledge? Doubtless, because we believe the truth of this article of faith. Why is it, then, that we have so little feeling either for the neglect shown to Jesus Christ in the most Blessed Sacrament, where He is visited by so few, or for the outrages He there endures from the very persons who profess to believe in Him? Certainly because the faith of Christians on this point is very weak. It is necessary, then, to have a lively faith, in order to have this ardent love for Jesus Christ in the most Blessed Sacrament, and to be touched by a sense of the insults to which the excess of His love for us

exposes Him; and to acquire, in fine, a true devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ. In order to attain this, we must lead a pure and innocent life. We must animate our faith by our assiduity, and especially by our profound respect when we present ourselves before the most Blessed Sacrament, and by every sort of good works. We must pray much, and often ask of God this lively faith. We must, in a word, act like persons who believe, and we shall soon feel ourselves animated with this lively faith.

Third Disposition

A great desire of having an ardent love of Jesus Christ

The third disposition is a great desire of having an ardent love of Jesus Christ. It is impossible to have a lively faith and live in innocence without being at the same time inflamed with a most ardent love of Jesus Christ, or at least with an ardent desire of loving Him. This desire of having an ardent love of Jesus Christ is a disposition absolutely necessary for acquiring devotion to the Sacred Heart, which is itself a continual exercise of this ardent love. Jesus Christ never gives this love but to those who earnestly desire it. The capacity of our heart is measured by the greatness of its desires. All the Saints agree that the best disposition for acquiring a tender love of Jesus Christ is to have a great desire to love Him. *Blessed*, says the Son of God, *are they that hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall have their fill.* A heart must necessarily be purified by this ardent desire to be in a condition to be enkindled by the pure flames of divine love. This ardent desire not only disposes our heart to be inflamed with love for Jesus Christ, it also obliges our loving Savior to enkindle in our hearts this sacred fire. Let us desire truly to love Him. Such a desire, we may say, is always efficacious. It is unheard of that Jesus Christ ever refused His love to those who desire it.

Can we ask for anything more reasonable? Is it possible for any easier condition to be required? There is no Christian

that does not pretend to have at least a wish to love Jesus Christ. But how then is it, if this desire be so suitable a disposition for acquiring an ardent love for Jesus Christ, that so few have an ardent love of Him, though all flatter themselves they possess this disposition, and Jesus Christ is always ready to give His love to those who are well disposed? It is because our heart is filled with self-love, and what we call a desire of loving Jesus Christ is nothing but a mere speculation, a barren knowledge of the obligation we are under of loving Him. It is an act of the intellect, not of the will. This knowledge, which is common to all who have any sense of the benefits which they have received from Him, passes for a true desire in the minds of many who, provided they have some specious pretext for deceiving themselves, readily persuade themselves that they are in a good state of conscience. To convince ourselves that we have not a true desire of loving Jesus Christ, we have only to compare this pretended desire with any other desire which really influences us. How anxious we are, what efforts we make, when we love anything passionately! We are wholly occupied by the desire, we think of it, we speak of it at all times, we are continually taking measures and seeking means, we even lose our sleep in order to ensure its accomplishment. And what similar effect has ever been produced in us by the desire we pretend to have of loving Jesus Christ? Has the fear of not acquiring this love ever cost us much labor? Does the thought of it occupy us much? The truth is that we do not love Jesus Christ, and we are deceived when we flatter ourselves that we have a great desire of loving Him. The true desire of loving our divine Savior approaches too nearly to true love, not to produce the same effects. It is in vain that we make use of all the artifices of self-love. It will never be true that we have a great desire to love Jesus Christ, as long as we love Him so little. There is great danger that these sort of fruitless desires, which we sometimes feel, of loving Jesus Christ, may be little sparks of an almost extinguished fire and real signs of the tepidity in which we live. If we have not this ardent love for Jesus Christ, let us make, at least once in our

life, some serious reflection on the obligation we are under of loving Him, and it is certain, that it will at least give rise to a true desire of being inflamed with this ardent love.

Fourth Disposition

Interior Recollection

The fourth disposition necessary for this devotion, if we would taste its sweetness and draw from it all its advantages, is interior recollection. Almighty God does not make Himself heard in a confusion. A heart open to every object, a mind constantly scattered abroad, and incessantly occupied with a variety of superfluous cares and useless thoughts, is not in a state to hear the voice of Him Who communicates Himself and speaks to the heart in solitude.

Perfect devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ is a continual exercise of the love of Jesus Christ. It cannot, then, exist without this recollection. Jesus Christ communicates Himself to the soul in a particular manner by means of this devotion. It is necessary, then, that she should be at peace, free from embarrassment and from the tumult of external things; in a state to hear the voice of her loving Savior and taste the special graces which He bestows on a heart, free from all that can disquiet it, and prepared to be occupied with God alone.

This interior recollection is so completely the foundation-stone of the spiritual edifice in our souls, that without it, it is impossible to advance in perfection. It may be said that all the graces which a soul, not yet established on this foundation, receives from God are but characters formed in water, or letters imprinted on sand. The reason is this. To advance in perfection we must unite ourselves more and more closely with God. Now, without interior recollection, we cannot unite ourselves with God; for He makes His dwelling only amidst the peace of the mind, and the retirement of a soul that is not dissipated by various objects, nor disturbed by the

perplexity of exterior occupations. St. Gregory observes, that when Jesus Christ wishes to inflame a soul with His divine love, one of the first graces He gives her, is a great attraction to interior recollection.

It may be said, that the most ordinary source of our imperfections is the want of recollection and attention to ourselves. This is what stops so many in the path of piety. This it is which causes the soul to find scarcely any relish in the holiest exercises of devotion. No one who had but little recollection has ever been very devout. Whence is it, said a holy man, that so many religious, so many devout persons who have good desires, and who seem to do all that is necessary to become holy, nevertheless draw so little fruit from their prayers, communions, spiritual reading; and that, after having practiced all the exterior exercises of spiritual life for so many years, they appear to have drawn scarcely any profit from them? How is it that directors, who guide others in the path of perfection, remain themselves subject to their ordinary imperfections? That men of zeal, laborers who give themselves with so much ardor to the salvation of souls, persons who are entirely occupied in good works, still have passions so strong, are always subject to the same failings, experience scarcely any facility in prayer, and pass their whole life in a sort of languor, without ever tasting the ineffable sweetness of peace of heart, always in disquiet; persons whom the thought of death terrifies, and the least misfortune depresses? All this comes from their negligence in guarding their heart and preserving it in recollection. These persons leave the care of their interior, and give themselves too much to the exterior. Hence it follows that they fail to perceive a number of failings, inconsiderate words, caprices, irregular affections, purely natural actions. This would not happen if they were attentive in regulating their interior and a little more careful in their actions, so as to prevent the passions which there find their nourishment from daily gaining strength, and this with the greater danger from their being masked under an appearance of zeal and of virtue.

It must therefore be acknowledged, that interior recollection is so necessary for having a perfect love of Jesus Christ and advancing in the spiritual life, that we make progress therein only in proportion as we give ourselves to it. It was by this that St. Ignatius, St. Francis de Sales, St. Teresa, St. Francis Xavier, and St. Aloysius Gonzaga attained the height of perfection. If we do not take care to keep ourselves recollected during our actions, we shall draw little fruit from them, however excellent they may be in themselves. Let us keep silence if we wish to hear the voice of Jesus Christ. Let us keep our mind at a distance from the tumult and embarrassment of exterior concerns, that we may be at liberty to converse with Him longer, and to love Him tenderly and ardently.

The devil, who knows well the great advantages that a soul derives from this interior peace, and this custody of the heart, will omit nothing to make her lose this recollection. As he despairs of inducing her to leave off her exercises of devotion and her good works, he makes use of these good works themselves, to lead her to dissipate herself abroad and go forth, so to speak, from that retreat where she was safe from his persecutions. A soul, attracted by the satisfaction which is found in this crowd of external actions, led away by the specious pretext of doing much for God, becomes dissipated, and loses imperceptibly that union with God and the sweetness of His presence, without which she labors much and yet advances little. A dissipated soul is like a lost and wandering sheep which is speedily devoured by the wolf. We think that we shall find it easy to enter again into ourselves. But, besides the fact that the presence of God is a grace which is not always at our disposal, the soul is no longer in a state to free herself from the numberless external objects that occupy her. She has lost the relish for spiritual things by the too long sojourn she has made, so to speak, in a foreign country. The remorse and uneasiness she feels, whenever she fixes her attention on herself, make this interior recollection a torment to her. She is dissipated, and in the end she loves the dissipation. Oh my God! What a loss it is for a soul to

spread herself continually abroad on external things! What inspirations, what graces does she render useless! Of what favors does she deprive herself, by the want of recollection!

If we would escape this misfortune, we must take great care to keep ourselves always in the presence of God and to preserve the spirit of recollection in all our exterior occupations. When the mind is working, the heart must be in repose—immovable in its center, which is the will of God. From this it must never separate itself. To acquire this interior recollection (for, though it is a gift of God, it is never refused to those who desire it with ardor and take means to obtain it), we must accustom ourselves to make many reflections on the motives which should actuate us in all we do. Before beginning an action, let us always take a glance to see if it is well ordered, if it is pleasing to God and if we are doing it for Him. During the action, let us from time to time raise our heart to God and renew the purity of our intention. A sign that we are doing an action for God is that we leave it easily, continue it without uneasiness or regret, and are not annoyed when we are interrupted in it. But the surest and most effectual practice to preserve interior recollection in our principal exterior actions is, to represent to ourselves Jesus Christ as He labored. Let us represent to ourselves with what modesty and exactness He worked when He was upon earth; how He applied Himself to perform perfectly all that He did; and with what meekness, with what tranquility He accomplished it. What a difference between His manner of working and ours! If what we have to do is displeasing to us, what specious reasons do we not allege to exempt ourselves from it! What pretexts do we make use of to put it off! With what tepidity and indifference do we perform it? If it suits our inclinations, we feel a degree of joy that soon causes dissipation in our soul. The mere thought of not succeeding, renders us uneasy and melancholy. Let us then propose to ourselves Jesus Christ as a model. We must look at Him continually, if we wish to keep ourselves in interior recollection and to advance in His love.

When it is said, that in order to preserve ourselves in

interior recollection we must not be too much taken up with external things, it is not meant that exterior employments which are of obligation are an impediment to interior recollection. We may be very recollected whilst in action. The greatest saints, who have had most intimate communication with God and who have consequently been most recollected, have been most actively employed in external actions. Such were the Apostles and apostolic men who have been employed in the salvation of their neighbor. It is therefore a mistake to suppose that the greatest exterior occupations are obstacles to interior recollection. Provided it be Almighty God who places us in these employments, these same employments are the most suitable means to keep us continually united with God. All that is necessary is, that we only lend, as it were, our mind to these external things, and do not give them our heart.

We must absolutely choose one of these two things, said a great servant of God, either to become an interior man or to lead a tepid and almost useless life. If we are not very careful to preserve our interior recollection, so far shall we be from fulfilling the designs of God that we shall not even know them, and we shall never arrive, either at the degree of sanctity our state requires, or at perfection.

A man that is not recollected wanders about without finding rest anywhere. He seeks after all kinds of objects without feeling satisfied with any. Whereas, if by giving himself to recollection he entered into himself, he would there find God. He would feel a satisfaction in God, who by His presence would fill him with so great an abundance of His gifts that he would no longer go to find elsewhere wherewith to satisfy his desires. This is what may be seen every day in interior persons. We imagine that the love they have for retirement and the pain they feel in diffusing themselves outwardly, is an effect of melancholy. But it is not so. They taste Almighty God within themselves; and the ineffable sweetness with which they are filled, makes them feel the diversions and pleasures which are met with in the world so insipid and nauseous that they have a horror of them. When we have once felt what

Almighty God is and relished spiritual things, everything connected with flesh and blood becomes insipid.

What wonderful advantages are derived from the interior life, by those who have once established themselves in it! It may be said, that they alone relish Almighty God and feel the true sweetness of virtue. I do not know whether it be the effect of interior recollection or the reward of the care they take to keep themselves constantly united with God, but it is certain that an interior man possesses faith, hope and charity in so sublime a degree that nothing is capable of shaking him in his belief. He finds himself insensibly superior to all human fears. He is always in the same state of mind, always immovable in God. He takes occasion to raise his heart to God, from everything he sees and hears. He sees only God in creatures, in the same manner as, when we have looked for a long time upon the sun, we imagine that we behold it in everything we look upon afterwards.

Nor are we to suppose that recollection makes persons idle and favors negligence. A man that is truly interior works more, does more good, and renders more service to the Church in a day, than many others who are not interior can render it in many years, even if they possessed greater natural abilities. Not only because dissipation is an obstacle to the fruits of zeal, but because the man who is not recollected, and yet labors much, labors indeed for God; whereas, in the case of one who is recollected, it is God Himself who, by means of that recollection, works for man. That is to say, a person who does not live in recollection may have God for the motive of his actions, but humor, self-love and nature have generally the greater share in his good works. On the contrary, a recollected person, always attentive to himself and to God, always on the watch against the caprices of nature and the artifices of self-love, works for God alone, and according to the impression and the direction of the Spirit of God.

The difference that is to be seen between an interior man and one who is not so, should be enough of itself to give us an esteem for recollection. We see in a man that is little recollected,

an air of dissipation, which obscures the most striking actions of virtue and which has in it something so repulsive, that it lessens the esteem we had conceived for his piety and causes his words to have little or no unction. On the contrary, what an impression does that air of modesty, meekness and peace, which are visible on the countenance of a truly interior person—that reserve, silence, and continual guard over himself, make upon our minds? Does not all this inspire veneration and love for virtue? It is very difficult to be long recollected, without being really devout. For it is a certain fact, that the want of devotion generally springs from the want of recollection. The means of acquiring this interior recollection and of preserving this precious gift is to be very careful:

1st. To avoid too great eagerness in what we do and not to undertake anything which may prevent us from fulfilling, with entire liberty of spirit, our usual exercises of devotion.

2nd. Never to distract our heart with unnecessary occupations, so as to render it barren for prayer.

3rd. So to watch over ourselves and keep ourselves so disposed as to be always ready for prayer.

4th. To make ourselves masters of our actions, by raising ourselves, as it were, above our employments, keeping our hearts free from the embarrassment and tumult that are generally caused in souls, by works of zeal, application to study, the care of a family, commerce with the world, the perplexity of business, and never considering the employments of our state, but as means to arrive at our last end.

5th. Retirement and silence are powerful means for gaining recollection. It is very difficult for a person who talks much to be very interior.

6th. Interior recollection is not only the sign of great purity of heart, it is also its reward. *Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God*; that is to say, they shall walk continually in His presence.

7th. To make this exercise of the presence of God easier to us, we may take some sign that may remind us of it, as the striking of the clock, the beginning and end of every action,

every time we enter our room or leave it, the sight of a picture, the arrival of a person and similar circumstances.

8th. Reserve and modesty in all we do are excellent means for becoming interior, especially if we are careful to propose to ourselves for a model, the modesty and meekness of Jesus Christ.

9th. Frequent reflection is a great help to anyone that wishes to become interior: to consider from time to time, that God is within us, or rather that we are in Him; that wherever we are, He sees us, He hears us, He is close to us,—at prayer, at work, at table, in society; to make acts of faith in the presence of God; to be modest, alone as well as in company.

Finally, interior recollection is a gift of God. We must often ask this gift, and ask it as a necessary disposition for having an ardent love of Jesus Christ. This motive gives an efficacy to all our prayers. Devotion to the Saints who have excelled most in interior life, may be of great use for obtaining interior recollection. Such are the Queen of all the Saints, St. Joseph, St. Anne, St. Joachim, St. John the Baptist, and in particular, St. Aloysius Gonzaga.

Chapter VI

The obstacles which prevent us from gathering all the fruit we ought from the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ

As the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ is useful, easy, reasonable, and solid, in the highest degree, there are few persons of solid virtue who do not relish it and practice it. But all do not feel that ardent love for Jesus Christ, nor that true sweetness which He imparts to those who love Him, though these special favors are the fruit of devotion to His Sacred Heart. Whatever impedes the progress of souls in perfection, is an obstacle to the signal graces which this devotion procures us. These obstacles, which few are found to overcome, dry up, as it were, the fountain of these great graces, and are the reason why Almighty God communicates Himself only to a few. We have been in the habit of complaining that we scarcely ever taste, in our practices of devotion, that heavenly sweetness which the saints enjoyed, and which, though not necessarily a part of sanctity, helps very much to make Saints. We experience nothing but dryness, tepidity, and disgust, in our exercises of piety. We have no consolation, no sweetness in prayer, no sentiment of devotion, either at Holy Communion or Mass. We feel coldness and weariness in all that ought to be our greatest delight and our deepest interest. Upon this, what do we do? We try to console ourselves by the thought that sanctity does not consist in sensible devotion. But whilst we are so tepid and imperfect, we have reason to fear that it is in punishment of our want of fidelity, that Almighty God does not allow us to experience that interior sweetness, and those spiritual consolations, which would help very much to make us more courageous and more perfect.

The path of perfection is not different now, from that in

which the Saints have walked. They all acknowledge, that it is not possible to conceive greater pleasure than is felt in the service of God. They tell us that therein the soul is replenished with such great sweetness, that the greatest austerities and labors are delightful to her. She does not know what it is to feel disgust or melancholy. What appears most frightful, causes in her a joy so pure and perfect, that the most terrible misfortunes of life cannot trouble it. They assure us that even the most severe trials which Almighty God sends them, have their sweetness and consolation; that sin alone can destroy the peace they enjoy; that Almighty God inspires them with so much confidence in His mercy, that their own failings do not disturb their peace.

These are not the sentiments of a few only. It is what all the true servants of God, of every rank, of every nation, and in all states of life, have experienced. It is what they have confirmed at the moment of death, that moment of the greatest sincerity. What motive can we possibly have for imagining that persons so wise, of a probity and virtue so universally recognized, should have wished to deceive us or themselves. With so many irreproachable witnesses, who all speak from experience, and with the greatest unanimity, can any reasonable person doubt the truth of a fact so well established? Whence is it, then, that amongst so many who at the present day profess piety, and seem to walk in the footsteps of these Saints, so few are to be found who receive the same graces? Without doubt, it is because there are very few whose virtue is really solid. Sanctity does not, it is true, consist in these feelings of sensible devotion; but it is no less certain that this interior joy, that peace which all the misfortunes of life cannot disturb, that perfect submission to God's will, that sweet confidence in His mercy, which is what is meant by this sensible devotion, has been the portion of all the Saints, and is still of all the true servants of God.

We have now seen what true sweetness there is in the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ. That the fruit of this devotion is a most ardent and tender love for Jesus

Christ, accompanied by that interior joy, that sweetness, that unalterable peace, which surpass all understanding, and are so many gifts inseparable from the perfect love of Jesus Christ. We are now going to consider what are the obstacles which hinder us from deriving this fruit from it. They may be reduced to four: great tepidity in the service of God; a great fund of self-love; a secret pride; and certain passions, that we have not taken care to mortify in the beginning of our conversion. From these four heads, as from four fatal sources, proceed all those failings and imperfections, which keep so many souls back in the path of piety, destroy the most noble designs, and the most generous resolutions, and finally, render the most holy practices of devotion fruitless.

First Obstacle

Tepidity

As the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ is a continual exercise of ardent love, it is very plain that tepidity is one of its greatest obstacles, and hinders all its fruit. Though the Son of God has an infinite hatred of sin, He has not a horror of the sinner. He calls him, He seeks him, and has compassion on him. But His Divine Heart cannot endure a tepid soul. *I would thou wert cold or hot*, says our Blessed Savior to us, *but because thou art lukewarm, I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth* (Apoc. 3:15). The Heart of Jesus Christ looks for pure souls, who are capable of His love. His Sacred Heart is always liberal. It seeks souls that are in a state to receive Its favors, and to reach the degree of perfection for which He destines them. This is what is not to be found in a soul that lives in tepidity. A tepid soul is in a state of blindness, caused by the passions that tyrannize over her; by the continual dissipation in which she lives, and which prevents her from entering into herself; by the multitude of sins that she commits, and by the subtraction of heavenly graces, which her resistance draws upon her. This blindness leads to the formation of a false

conscience, under cover of which, as if in security, a soul whilst frequenting the Sacraments, may remain for many years in considerable sins. They are hidden from her, or disguised by passion, because she has neither the will, nor the courage to correct herself of them.

We sometimes see religious persons, or seculars who make a profession of piety, nourish secret aversions, envenomed jealousies, dangerous affections, a spirit of bitterness or murmuring against their superiors, a fund of self-love and pride, that diffuses itself over almost all their actions, and other failings of a like nature. In the midst of these they live tranquilly, falsely persuading, or trying to persuade themselves, that there is nothing very sinful in all this, and seeking reasons to excuse faults, which Almighty God condemns as grievous sins, and which they themselves will condemn at the hour of death, when passion will not prevent their seeing things as they really are.

What makes this state still more perilous, and obliges Jesus Christ to reject a tepid soul, is, that she is in a certain way, beyond hope, for tepidity is scarcely ever cured. As the sins which a tepid soul commits, are not of that gross and scandalous kind, that horrify a soul which has a little fear remaining, but are purely interior and do not pass beyond the heart, they easily escape the notice of a conscience that is not over particular, and of a soul that pays little attention to herself. Hence, as she does not know the greatness of her malady, she does not take the trouble to remedy it. Whereas, a great sinner, as he easily knows his sins, is in a better state to feel their weight and conceive a horror of them. And in this sense Our Lord says, it is better to be cold than lukewarm.

The most solid practices of devotion are useless to a soul that is in this unhappy state, either because the little profit she derives from the holiest exercises of piety takes from her the desire of making use of them, or because, in consequence of her being used to these holy exercises, they have less effect upon her. The great and terrible truths of salvation, which terrify by their novelty, and shake with their force the greatest

sinners, make scarcely any impression on her, in consequence of her having gone over them so frequently and with so little profit. As soon as a soul gives herself up to tepidity, she no longer thinks of anything but herself. She continually seeks after what can give her pleasure. She has a delicacy that sometimes surpasses that of the most sensual persons: a love of self, which not being weakened by foreign objects, is the stronger from being shut up in herself alone, and is entirely applied in forming for herself an easy and tranquil life. A soul in this state, insensible to the most striking truths of eternity, is still more insensible to the manifest proofs of the love of Jesus Christ for us. She is too far removed from the necessary dispositions for devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to draw any profit from it.

The marks by which we may know if we are in the dangerous state of tepidity, are:

1) Great negligence in all spiritual exercises; prayer without attention, confessions without amendment, communions without preparation and without fruit.

2) The continual dissipation of a mind which is scarcely ever attentive to itself or to God, but which continually diffuses itself over all kinds of objects, and occupies itself in a thousand trifles.

3) A bad habit of performing her actions without any interior spirit, but either through caprice or habit, scarcely doing anything in which passion, self-love or human respect have not some share.

4) Sloth in acquiring the virtues belonging to her state.

5) A disgust for spiritual things, and especially an indifference for great virtues. The yoke of Jesus Christ begins to appear heavy; the exercises of piety become burdensome; the maxims of the Gospel regarding the hatred of self, the love of crosses and humiliations, the necessity of doing violence to oneself, of walking by the narrow way, seem impracticable. The continual exercise of modesty, mortification and interior recollection is found insupportable, the life of persons of solid virtue is regarded as unhappy, and the practice of virtue almost impossible.

The 6th effect of tepidity is an insensibility of conscience for lesser sins. We no longer feel remorse for our ordinary infidelities, or relapses, and we allow ourselves to commit all sorts of venial sins deliberately.

But how much is it to be feared that this want of tenderness of conscience—this facility in continually falling into the same faults, and in confessing them without amendment—this negligence—this contempt for small things—this indifference for the greater virtues—this inconstancy in the exercises of piety—this perpetual alternation between fervor and relaxation, may be visible signs of a dying faith, of an almost extinguished charity? How much is it to be feared that this unhappy state of tepidity may lead us imperceptibly into that of hardness of heart and insensibility? It is the more dangerous, as it is less perceived, and as its consequences are less feared. And yet, nothing is more common. Such persons as do not relish the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ, those who draw no fruit from its practice, have great reason to fear that this is the obstacle which occasions their disgust, and hinders them from profiting by the holiest exercises of piety.

As the fatal cause of this unhappy state of tepidity is generally to be found in a great fund of self-love, the means recommended in the following chapter, for subduing, or, at least, mortifying self-love, will serve as a remedy for tepidity, since true mortification is inseparable from fervor. What has been said of tepidity is partly drawn from the Spiritual Retreat, according to the spirit and method of Ignatius, composed by Father François Nepveu, of the Society of Jesus. It may be useful to add the following reflections:

1. It is extraordinary that there should be any religious persons, who, after having been generous, in leaving great things for God, should prefer afterwards in religion to be deprived of the greater graces of God, rather than abandon some trifles which constantly retard their progress in the way of piety. For faults, however slight, when they are committed with advertence,

are a continual impediment to that joy and ineffable sweetness, which are experienced by those who serve God with fervor.

2. It is no less extraordinary that persons who have made such great sacrifices to secure their salvation and merit a happy and tranquil death, for want of a little generosity die with disquiet and full of regret, after having so long and so greatly feared to die.

3. What is it that keeps us back? It is not possible but that, in religion, we should frequently have good desires. But it is astonishing that we fail to execute them through a kind of sloth, of which worldly persons would not believe us capable. We had begun so well to serve God: did we intend then to deceive men? If God was really the motive of our conversion, whence is it, that though the same motive continues, we do not persevere?

4. Truly, either the Saints have done too much, or we do not do enough to become Saints. But some may say we must be Saints, to live as the Saints have lived. Let us rather say: we must become Saints; and it is only by living like the Saints, that we can hope to become so.

5. We are not easily tired, we do not find the time too long, when amassing riches to leave to others, or when occupied in procuring ourselves a vain reputation in the world. But to acquire eternal felicity in heaven, we think we have always time enough. A person with fine natural gifts, great talents and a lively disposition, some may say, cannot make up his mind to lead a perfect life. But when did the finest natural qualities, which have always been great helps to attain the most exalted virtue, become obstacles to sanctity?

6. What an error it is to imagine that there can be any age or condition unsuited to the practice of the highest virtues! What will these persons say when they shall be shown a multitude of Saints of every age, of every rank, who have become great Saints in every state, and in all sorts of employments? Not only will the example

of these Saints one day form our accusation, we shall be ourselves our own condemnation. Whilst we attempt to excuse our tepidity, and our negligence, by alleging our age, our employments and our condition, it will be shown to us, that at the same age, in the same employments, and the same condition, we have suffered and labored more for the world, than Almighty God required of us to labor in order to gain heaven.

7. There is no one who would venture to say, or who would believe, that after spending ten years in the study of human sciences, he would think himself fortunate if he knew as much as he had learned in the first six months after he began his studies. Yet we find persons who make profession of piety, persons whose chief employment is to become perfect, who, after ten and twenty years of study and practice in the sublime science of salvation, are not ashamed to say, and are not displeased if others believe, that they would think themselves very happy, if they were as fervent, as mortified and as holy, as they were after the first six months of their perfect conversion. It is true that they manage to stupefy themselves, as it were, by exterior dissipation, and the insipid pleasures of a tepid life: but, sooner or later, they will arrive at the end of their life, and what sentiments will they have at the hour of death?

8. Are we well convinced of the great truths of our religion? If we do not believe, we do too much. But if we believe, certainly we do too little. What is it that is at stake? So much is said of the importance of salvation, of the value of the soul, of eternity. Is it true that I am in the world only in order to save my soul? That Jesus Christ became man only to show us that this is the only business of mankind, that it alone deserves our application, alone demands our whole application, and depends on our application? Is it true that if this affair succeeds ill all is lost? That to put oneself in danger of succeeding ill in this, is to risk all; and that to live in tepidity, is to place ourselves in a kind of

necessity of succeeding ill? Is it true that this is the affair of eternity? Can Almighty God have been deceived in saying that all the rest is of no consequence? Can He have employed His care and His providence without sufficient purpose, in referring all things to this one end? Is God then of so little consequence, that it can be an indifferent matter to us whether we lose Him? Why so many tears, so many and such bitter regrets in hell, if the good, which the damned have lost, deserved so little effort to secure it? Why shudder at the very thought of eternity, if it matters so little whether we be eternally unhappy? But do we show any great apprehension of this misfortune, if we take so little trouble to avoid it? Are we taking much trouble if we continue in the tepidity and indifference in which we live?

9. If we were careful to make these reflections frequently, we should be ashamed to lead a tepid life, and to be so backward in God's service. We should soon take the resolution of loving Jesus Christ. But alas! After we have made these reflections, and have been moved by them, the moment afterwards we seek to distract ourselves, as if we were sorry to have made them, and to have been touched by them. "*He shall be compared to a man beholding his own countenance in a glass. For he beheld himself, and went his way, and presently forgot what manner of man he was*" (James 1:23-24).

Second Obstacle

Self-love

It is a most certain fact, that there are very few who do not act through self-love. All the difference that there is between spiritual persons and those who are not so is, that in the one, self-love acts without disguise, while in the others, it is less perceptible and more masked. Anyone who would take the trouble to make a few reflections, on the true motives of the

greater part of his actions, which appear the least defective, would discover numberless windings and turnings of a secret self-love which forms their principal motive and destroys all their fruit. We relish and approve of only such practices of virtue as we find easy. The specious pretext of preserving our health, which we imagine to be so necessary for the glory of God, takes up our whole mind with a thousand little cares. We are careful of ourselves. Most kinds of mortification appear to us to be either indiscreet, or not suited to our age or our state. The thoughts and desires which God gives us, from time to time, of attending seriously to our perfection, we treat as illusions.

We wish to persuade ourselves that God does not require from us so high a sanctity, though He has granted us very great graces, or has placed us in a state that requires us to be great saints. We flatter ourselves that we have a true desire of leaving all things as soon as the will of God shall be manifested to us. In vain does God make Himself heard in the depth of our heart by His inspirations, in vain does He speak to us by means of a director or spiritual father, or by means of the reflections we make, of the lights we receive, of the examples we see, and which we ourselves are ready to praise. The voice of God is not recognized when it is opposed to self-love. The reason is, that it is not the will of God that we take as the rule of our life, but our own inclination and self-love. We would fain make these the rule of the will of God.

Whence comes it that there are some persons who are never more uneasy, more melancholy, more full of resentment, or ill-humored, than when they are more recollected, and seem to be applying more particularly to their perfection? It is because the lights they then receive in prayer, and the inspirations which God gives them, disturb them from their not being able to reconcile them with the self-love that fills their minds. It seems as though they expected that the path of perfection should present no difficulty, or that God should heap upon them sweetness and interior consolations before they have taken the first step in the way to perfection.

As the life of such persons seems well regulated, and their conduct irreproachable, they go on unhappily crawling and languishing during their whole life in this state, without ever correcting a single failing.

It would be better for us, if we may say so, not to have certain virtues with the possession of which we comfort ourselves. We should at least acknowledge our indigence and misery. But the little virtue we possess serves only to render us daily more imperfect. We content ourselves with a composed exterior, a natural or affected modesty, an apparent virtue, which is rather the effect of education than of grace; and as we see that we are secure from the reproaches which those whose lives are ill-regulated draw upon themselves, we imagine that we have a great fund of virtue, because we do not allow many faults to appear.

We form to ourselves a plan of devotion according to our humor, our natural inclination, and our caprice. We find many inexperienced or yielding directors who approve this system upon which our whole life turns, and thus we become insensible to the examples, the reflections, and the truths which move the greatest sinners. We need not wonder, if, being so full of self-love, we are always seeking our ease in trifles. We cannot bear to want anything, under the pretext that we are willing to leave all. If we deprive ourselves of anything, we generally do it in order that we may deceive ourselves by this pretended mortification, and enjoy in quiet many other things which are dearer to us, and of which we are unwilling to deprive ourselves. We mostly act either from nature or inclination. We feel tenderness only for those with whom we sympathize. We refuse nothing to our senses, and if we mortify them in anything, it is only in what gives us the least difficulty, or when such mortification does us honor. We are willing to do good works, but we wish to choose what we will do. Hence it follows that we feel nothing but disgust for the slightest obligations which our state imposes on us, whilst we find great attraction in more painful occupations, either because they are of our own choice, or because they put us

under the necessity of exempting ourselves from the ordinary obligations of our state. We consider sickness in others as a visitation, and as a gift of God; but, as soon as Almighty God grants us this gift, we become uneasy, melancholy, impatient, and anxious. It is not that sickness is the cause of this. But we show in sickness what we really are, because we have then no longer the motives or the means which health afforded us for disguising our self-love.

From the same source, too, proceed those barren desires and chimerical projects which form the food of a spirit naturally proud, and which give nourishment to self-love. We propose to ourselves certain plans of life which we intend to carry out at certain times; and, as if our conversion and sanctification were secure, we take no further trouble about correcting our imperfections. Though we are convinced that mortification is absolutely necessary if we would be holy, we refuse the crosses that present themselves under the pretext that they are too small. We sigh after greater crosses, only because we see them at a greater distance. We satisfy ourselves in the meantime with these idle imaginations. We are at rest, confiding in this composed exterior, in these good works which please us, and in the practices of devotion in which we are most exact. We are intoxicated, as it were, with the vain and insipid praises of those who flatter us. We are full of the idea of some virtue which we possess only in name. At length we find ourselves, at the close of a long life, devoid of merit, and often without any sentiment, more praiseworthy than a vain and barren desire of being then as virtuous as we were at the beginning of our conversion.

Such are the effects of self-love, and few are exempt from it. We are to be pitied for nourishing within ourselves an enemy dangerous in proportion as he is crafty, and to be dreaded in proportion as we distrust him less. Now it is certain that Jesus Christ will never recognize as the true friends of His Heart those who love only their own ease, and who are so cautious about laboring for Him. This is what He has expressly said in giving us the description of His true servants.

In vain, says He, will anyone flatter himself that he is My disciple, because he has left for My love his goods, his parents, his friends, if he does not also renounce himself. We must do violence to ourselves, make war against our passions, stifle or at least mortify our self-love in everything, in order to be truly His disciples. There is no true love of Jesus Christ where there is no true mortification.

Third Obstacle

A Secret Pride

Secret pride is no less an obstacle to the love of Jesus Christ. It seems that there cannot be a greater obstacle to our perfection, and consequently to an ardent love of Jesus Christ, than the spirit of vanity, from which there are so very few who preserve themselves. Our other enemies we weaken and overcome by the practice of virtue; whereas, it is in the very practice of virtue itself, that this enemy finds its strength. Our very victories are weapons which the devil makes use of, to vanquish us, by taking occasion from them to inspire us with pride. We may say, that of all vices, there is none that has kept so many souls back in the path of piety, or that has plunged so many from the highest perfection into tepidity, and even into sin. From this spirit of vanity proceed the inordinate desire that we have to be seen, and the excessive eagerness we feel to succeed in all that we undertake.

In vain do we torment ourselves, to assure ourselves that in all this we are seeking nothing but the glory of God. We have but to listen to our conscience, to be convinced that we seek nothing but our own glory. That excessive uneasiness which the fear of not succeeding causes in us; that sadness and discouragement we experience after a failure; that joy and satisfaction we feel at the sight of the honors and praises we receive, are clear proofs of the spirit of vanity that urges us to act.

This same spirit also mixes itself up with the practice of

the highest virtues: we wish to be highly mortified, to be obliging, courteous, civil, charitable, and we may add, to give great edification to our neighbor, by appearing so.

From the same source spring almost all our defects. We fill our minds insensibly with the idea of a pretended merit, which we do not possess, and which this idea alone would make us lose, did we really possess it. We love to recount our adventures. We have always some circumstance of our life ready, as an example of the subject on which we are speaking. One would say, that it is no longer any failing to praise ourselves continually, when we already bear a good reputation. We wish to possess the esteem and the hearts of all. Hence it is that we prefer to omit our obligations, rather than disoblige another; and what is still more extraordinary, we try to cover this ambition and vanity by the specious pretext of civility, charity, and condescension. We falsely persuade ourselves that we must act thus, in order to make virtue less difficult to others. We wish to please both God and men. By this means, we very often fail to please men, and we always displease God. From the same source spring that delicacy regarding the point of honor, those little coolnesses in friendship, those regrets which approach so nearly to envy, if they have not all its malignity; that secret pain which is caused by the success of others. We always find some accident to which the greater part of their good fortune is attributed. We try to lower them. We speak coldly of them. We consider anyone who speaks in their praise, either tiresome or a flatterer. Whence proceeds all this? From our being filled with vanity and pride. We feel resentment at the least disagreeable word, or at the least sign of contempt. We think ourselves at liberty to omit certain acts of civility towards others; but we do not pardon them, if they fail in what we consider due to us. By a still more ridiculous illusion, we imagine that we owe it to the honor of God, Whom we serve, and of that exalted virtue which we flatter ourselves we possess, to display before the world our spirit, our talents, our good qualities, natural and supernatural. If anyone after this does not show us all the

esteem and veneration that we expected, this is enough to make us at once consider him as imperfect, or as one who has no regard for merit, or esteem for virtue.

Nor are these yet all the effects of this secret ambition. We love fame, applause and praise for all we do. We see some who labor much for God, but who are always saying how much they do. They are always uncomfortable, hurried, fatigued and oppressed; one would say that they are inviting everyone to have compassion on them, in their labors. The truth is, that vanity has a great part in so much labor. We think ourselves very important and necessary; and we wish to appear so. Pride comes in, even in the very actions that belong to humility. We love to distinguish ourselves in the practice of certain virtues, and even in the exercise of good works. But all this alacrity is not for God alone, it is also to secure our own distinction. Finally, that excessive sadness and discouragement which we feel after a relapse into our former failings, is not the effect of tenderness of conscience, as some imagine. It is the effect of a secret pride, which makes us think ourselves more holy than we really are.

In a word, we pass for spiritual persons, we even think ourselves such, and yet we are influenced merely by human prudence, disguised under the name of good sense. We refer all to the rule of this pretended good sense which we have framed for ourselves, in order that we may deceive ourselves without scruple. It is by this false rule that we judge even of spiritual things, of divine operations, and of the marvels of grace. We approve of nothing but what suits our ideas. The graces which God bestows either upon ourselves or others, we use according to the maxims of human prudence, and by an extraordinary blindness which is the chastisement of proud spirits, we think that we are following reason and good sense, the further we remove from the spirit of God.

Are we astonished, then, with all this, that we have neither spiritual consolations nor sentiments of devotion, after ten or twenty years spent by us in the exercise of virtue and the practice of good works? Do we lament that we make no

progress, that we are always imperfect, that the use of the Sacraments is of little profit to us, that we do not know what sensible devotion is? That secret pride which we nourish in the depth of our heart, dries up, as it were, the fountain of the greatest graces. It is this that causes persons so wise in appearance, so regular, so circumspect, who have lived with so much honor, and have been proposed as the model of those who are called wealthy in the world, and who, from appearances, ought to be loaded with spiritual riches, to find themselves at death with their hands empty of good works. This self-love, this little ambition, this secret pride, have robbed them of all, and corrupted everything. This is the worm that withers the loftiest oaks; this is the leaven that, sooner or later, corrupts the whole mass, or at least inflates it, and fills it with nothing but wind.

It is evident that the love of Jesus Christ cannot exist at the same time with a vice so opposed to it. How can our blessed Savior, who would have the first of the beatitudes, the foundation of the spiritual life, and the first step to be taken in the path of virtue, to be that spirit of humility which He Himself has chosen, in preference to all the other virtues as His own special characteristic;—how can He be greatly loved by those who so little resemble Him? This sincere humility of mind and heart is the distinctive character of Jesus Christ. It is impossible, then, to be animated by His spirit, and to dwell in His Heart, unless we are truly animated by this spirit of humility.

Fourth Obstacle

Some Unmortified Passion

The fourth obstacle, and the fourth source of those defects which hinder and destroy the love of Jesus Christ, and consequently the devotion to His Sacred Heart, are certain unmortified passions to which we are attached, and which, sooner or later, are the fatal cause of some great misfortune.

The greater number of persons who wish to give themselves

to God, and who consequently declare a mortal war against all vices, proceed in this war something in the same way as Saul did, in the war he undertook by the order of God against Amalech. *Now, therefore, go and smite Amalech, and utterly destroy all that he hath; spare him not, nor covet anything that is his* (1 Kings 15:3). Almighty God had ordered Saul to exterminate all the Amalekites, and destroy whatever belonged to them, without sparing anything. Saul exterminated the people, but, moved with compassion, he pardoned the king, and reserved for sacrifice whatever he found most precious on the field: *And Saul spared Agag...and all that was beautiful, and would not destroy them, but everything that was vile and good for nothing, that they destroyed. The Lord hath rejected thee from being king.* But this disobedience cost Saul his kingdom, and was the cause of his reprobation and ruin.

Many follow the example of Saul in the war they undertake against their vices. May God preserve them from a similar fate. We are well convinced that God wills that we should make a sacrifice to Him of all our passions, and that He cannot endure that we should spare any vice. But we consent to this only in appearance. We destroy, so to speak, all our enemies, but there is some predominant passion that we spare. There is always something particularly dear and precious that we do not touch. That we may deceive ourselves without scruple, we leave a place in our heart always with some good motive, for one of our enemies. We extinguish in ourselves the spirit of the world, but we like to see it still living in its followers. We dress ourselves with all modesty, but we wish a daughter to be attired in the extreme of unchristian fashions. We do not gamble, but we are recklessly extravagant in the entertainments which we give. We moderate our impetuosity and our anger, but we spare a secret ambition and some secret jealousy which we cannot resolve to overcome. We mortify that constant dissipation which is so unbecoming in persons who make profession of loving Jesus Christ in a special manner, but we will not deprive ourselves of the liberty of spending whole hours in visits and useless conversations.

Under the pretense that we must make ourselves agreeable to all, to gain all to Jesus Christ, and that we must make virtue easy, sweet, and amiable, we insensibly get into the habit of doing everything just like others, and reserve only the name and appearance of virtue.

Others, a little more generous, break the strongest links that kept them attached to the world. They leave their parents and their property. They even give up their liberty in a certain way, and submit to the yoke of religious obedience. But they do not take pains to break the smaller links, that is to say, to free themselves from a variety of little affections, which fail not to stop them, and retard their progress in the way of perfection. What does it matter, that the fetters which keep us bound to creatures are slight, if there are many of them? A single chain, however small, suffices to hinder us from advancing a single step when we will not break it.

Finally, there are some who are generous enough to resolve to overcome all. They even make some efforts to do so. But they do not touch their natural disposition or that failing which suits their inclinations best. This one enemy left unconquered, this single passion not mortified, this single chain unbroken, makes them go on creeping all their lives, and hinders them from arriving at the high perfection to which they were called—*The Lord hath rejected thee from being king.* A small leak is enough to sink a ship, and to bring to ruin in course of time the most splendid edifice. A spark suffices to cause a great conflagration. Death is often the consequence of a trifling sickness neglected. A single ill drawn stroke of the pencil is enough to discredit a picture, otherwise well executed.

We are surprised sometimes to see persons who have grown old in exercises of piety, men of consummate spirituality and highly mortified, who still retain very great imperfections which they themselves condemn in others, and of which, however, they never correct themselves. This arises from their familiarizing themselves, as it were, with their own failings. They have spared them from their youth; they

allow their natural disposition to act. They easily become impatient; they continually praise themselves always with some good motive, and under some grand pretext. They neglect to become perfect when they are young, and they find themselves most imperfect when they are old.

Such are the great obstacles to the love of Jesus Christ, and consequently to the devotion to His Sacred Heart. Such are the sources of the many imperfections that are noticed in persons who seem the most spiritual; imperfections, however, which do great injury to true piety, by the false idea they give of devotion. True piety always condemns these defects. The true love of Jesus Christ cannot exist together with these imperfections, this secret pride, this self-love. The effects of these three fatal sources are not to be found in those who possess this true love. And yet, without this pure and true love of Jesus Christ, there is no solid devotion, no perfect virtue.

"My God!" exclaimed a great servant of God, "what confusion and disorder is this? At one time we are cheerful, at another sad; today we are kind to everyone, tomorrow we are like a hedgehog, that no one can touch without being pricked." This is a clear proof of a want of virtue. It is a sign that nature still reigns in us, that our passions are not mortified. A truly virtuous man is always the same. If we do good only occasionally, is the danger not greater that we do it out of mere good humor, rather than from virtue?

Chapter VII

The means of overcoming the obstacles that hinder us from gathering the fruit we ought from the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ

It is certain that tepidity, self-love, secret pride, or any other passion that we have not taken care to mortify, are the chief springs of our imperfections, and the greatest obstacles to our gathering the fruit we ought from the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ. We have only a weak and languishing charity. We cherish within us our most formidable enemies. Without us are the devil who tempts us, the world which attracts us, objects which dazzle us, occasions which surround us, examples which draw us away. If, then, we are not always on our guard and do not keep the doors of our senses closed against all these enemies who besiege us, they will speedily make themselves masters of our heart. "It is extraordinary," says a great servant of God, "how many enemies we have to fight against. From the moment we form the resolution of becoming saints, they seem to be all let loose: the devil with his artifices, nature with the resistance it makes to our good desires, the praises of the good, the scoffs of the wicked, the solicitations of the tepid, the example of those who pass for devout, but are not so. If God visit us, we have to fear vanity; if He withdraw Himself, timidity. Discouragement may succeed the greatest fervor. Our friends tempt us by means of the condescension which we show towards them, the indifferent by the fear we have of displeasing them. Indiscretion is to be feared in fervor, sensuality in moderation, and self-love in everything. What then are we to do? For sanctity does not consist in being faithful for a day or a year, but in persevering and advancing until death. We must make use of those means which all the Saints, together with Jesus Christ Himself, assure us to be most suitable for weakening

and destroying that self-love and secret pride which are the source of all these impediments. These means are mortification and humility. We must resolve on one of two things, either never to have a perfect love for Jesus Christ, or to be truly humble and perfectly mortified.

First Means

True Mortification

Mortification is so necessary for the perfect love of Jesus Christ, that it is the first lesson that Jesus Christ Himself gives to those who wish to be His disciples. Without it, we can have no hope of ever being disciples of Jesus Christ. *If any man will come after Me*, says our loving Savior, *let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me* (Matt. 16:24) *and whosoever doth not carry his cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple* (Luke 14:27), *and is not worthy of Me* (Matt. 10:38). For this reason all the Saints agree in considering that there is no stronger proof of real piety than perfect mortification. Is he a very mortified person? asked St. Ignatius, when the virtue of someone was praised by others. He would give them to understand that true mortification is inseparable from true piety, not only because no virtue can long exist without constant and general mortification, but also, because, without mortification, there is no such thing as true virtue.

There are two sorts of mortifications: one exterior, which consists in the maceration of the body; the other interior, which is properly the mortification of the mind and heart. Both are necessary for attaining perfection. One cannot exist long without the other. Fasts, watchings, hair-shirts, and other bodily mortifications are powerful means to become truly spiritual and truly perfect; and when they are used with discretion, help marvelously to strengthen nature, always weak for good and prone to evil; to repress the assaults and escape the snares of our common enemy, and finally to obtain from the Father of mercies, the helps that are necessary

for all the just, and especially for beginners.

It is true that sanctity does not consist in exterior penances, and that they are not incompatible with hypocrisy. But it is not so with interior mortification. This is always a mark of true piety. It is, therefore, still more necessary than exterior mortification, and no one can reasonably abstain from it. We must do ourselves this violence continually, in order to gain heaven. All are not able to fast, or to wear a hair-shirt, but there is no one who cannot be silent, at a time when passion moves him to answer, or vanity to speak. There is no one who cannot mortify his natural disposition, his desires, his passions. It is in this that interior mortification chiefly consists. By it we weaken our self-love, reduce it to reason, and free ourselves from our imperfections. It is in vain that we flatter ourselves that we love Jesus Christ, if we are not mortified. All the sublimest sentiments of piety, all the practices of devotion are to be suspected, if not accompanied by this perfect mortification. We wonder to see ourselves so imperfect, and after so many practices of piety, so many communions, to feel the various passions that continually agitate our heart. Do we not see that it is the want of perfect mortification which is the source of all these disorders? It is necessary, then, if we would weaken and destroy this self-love, by which all the passions are fed, to resolve upon generous and constant mortification.

It is not enough to mortify ourselves for a certain time, and in some things. We must, if possible, mortify ourselves in all things and at all times, though with prudence and discretion. A single irregular gratification which you allow to nature has more effect in making her haughty and rebellious, than a hundred victories that you may have gained over her will have in weakening her. A truce with enemies of this kind is a victory for them. My brethren, says St. Bernard, what is lopped off, sprouts again; what is extinguished, rekindles; what is slumbering, wakes up again. To preserve the interior spirit of devotion we must prevent our soul from diffusing itself abroad. We must surround it on all sides, as the Prophet says, with a hedge of thorns. Now this we neglect to do; and hence our tepidity,

our relaxation, and all our undevotion. If we mortify nature in one thing, we immediately repay it by some other satisfaction which we allow it. If we are recollected in a retreat, as soon as it is over, we open all the doors of our senses to objects that will dissipate us. The exercise of this interior mortification, so habitual to all the Saints, is familiar to all those who have a true desire of perfection. We have but to attend to the suggestions of the Spirit of God. The love of Jesus Christ is so ingenious on this point, that the diligence and the methods of mortification, with which it at once inspires the most ignorant persons, surpass the ideas of the most learned, and may almost be called miraculous. There is nothing that does not afford them an opportunity of mortifying their natural inclinations. There is no time, or place, that does not seem suited to mortify themselves, without ever departing from the rules of real good sense. It suffices that they have a great wish to see or to speak, to oblige them to cast down their eyes, and be silent. The desire to hear news, or to know all that happens, is to them a constant motive for mortification. This mortification is the more meritorious in proportion, as it is less extraordinary, and has God for its sole witness. A happy remark, a wittyv pleasantry, may do us honor in society, but it may also form the subject of a pleasing sacrifice. There is scarcely an hour of the day which does not offer some opportunity of mortification. Whether we are sitting or standing, we can easily find a less comfortable place or position, without anything appearing exteriorly. If we are repeatedly interrupted in some very serious occupation, we can reply as often with as much mildness and civility as if we had not been occupied at all. The patience of a person of solid virtue, may find great exercise in the ill-temper of any one about him; the imperfections of a servant, or the ingratitude of one who is under obligations to him. Finally, inconveniences of place, season, or persons, borne in such a manner, as if we did not perceive them, are, it is true, small opportunities of denying ourselves—but mortification in these little things is no little matter. It is of great merit; and it may be said that the greatest graces and the most exalted sanctity, depend

generally on the generosity which we show in mortifying ourselves in these little things. It is not a small mortification to omit none of the duties of a community, and to conform oneself in all things to community life, without having any regard to our own inclinations, our employments, or age. This kind of mortification is the more valuable in proportion as it is less exposed to vanity and more conformable to the spirit of Jesus Christ.

But if we did not find in external things so many occasions for mortifying ourselves, they are always to be found within ourselves. We cannot be for a long time modest, recollected, reserved, without great mortification. Honesty, meekness and civility may be the effect of education, but they are generally the marks of one who is habitually mortified. Without this virtue how can we be in peace and always the same, do always perfectly what we do and be always content with what God wills?

Second Means

Sincere Humility

The second means is sincere humility. Jesus Christ, says St. Augustine, does not say to us, learn of Me to work miracles, but instead, learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart, to give us to understand, that, without humility, there is no true piety. We are sufficiently convinced of the necessity of this virtue; all the difficulty consists in knowing what is true humility. Many think they are truly humble, as soon as they have a low opinion of themselves. But they deceive themselves, if they are not at the same time well pleased, that others should entertain the same opinion of them. It is not enough that we acknowledge ourselves to possess no virtue or merit. We must believe it. We must be pleased that others believe it. The first step to be taken in gaining this virtue, is to beg it earnestly of God. The next is firmly to convince ourselves, by means of serious and frequent reflection

on ourselves, of our poverty and our own imperfections. The remembrance of what we have been, and the thought of what we may be, serve greatly to humble us. The truly virtuous think little of others, and occupy themselves solely with their own imperfections. The truly humble are scandalized at nothing, because they know their own weakness so well. They see themselves so near the precipice, and they are so much afraid of falling, that they are not surprised if others fall. The less we speak of ourselves, the more closely we conform ourselves to true humility. Those affected discourses, by which we wish to make it appear that we have little esteem for ourselves, have no effect usually but to gain us praise. The most certain mark of sincere humility is to have a special love for those who despise us: never to avoid any humiliations that present themselves to us; not to take pleasure in vain thoughts and vain projects for the future, which only serve to nourish a secret pride within us; never to speak to our own advantage; never to complain and not to allow others to complain of anything Almighty God allows to happen to us; to excuse the failings of our neighbor; never to be troubled at our own relapses; to defer to others in all things; never to undertake anything but with diffidence in ourselves, and to have little esteem for what we do. Finally, to pray much, and to speak little.

Anyone who is convinced that he is very miserable, is not offended if he is despised, he sees that it is only just. A humble man, whatever bad treatment he may receive, thinks that justice is done him. Men do not esteem me; they are right, they agree in this with God and with the Angels. Whoever has deserved hell, thinks that contempt is his due. It is not meant by this, that we are obliged to receive a humiliation with sensible pleasure. Contempt is naturally disagreeable. But not to complain, to be silent under contempt, to thank God for it, and to pray to Him for those whom He makes use of to humble us, whatever repugnance nature may feel in submitting, are certain marks of sincere humility, without which there is no virtue. We have enemies, says St. Paul, within and without

us, who spread snares for us on every side. The love of humility, of abjection, of a hidden and obscure life, is a powerful remedy against so many evils. There is no peace but in the forgetfulness of ourselves. If we wish to become perfect, we must resolve to forget even our own spiritual interests, and to seek only the pure glory of God.

The joy and true sweetness that are inseparable from the exercise of true mortification and sincere humility

There is no devotion without universal, generous and constant mortification. There is none without sincere humility. But is it possible to speak of humility and continual mortification, without terrifying persons who perhaps have some desire to gain an ardent love of Jesus Christ? Do they not immediately tremble at the thought of so uncomfortable a condition?

Who can look upon a life full of crosses without feeling horror? To thwart our natural inclinations in everything, to deny our senses every satisfaction that is not absolutely necessary, to live in retirement and silence, without seeking the esteem of men, taking pleasure in their praises, or feeling regret at their contempt,—is not this, we may say, to lead a very unhappy life? All, however, who live in this manner, declare that they are perfectly happy. The world says that this kind of life is insupportable; but Jesus Christ Himself says that it is sweet and easy, full of joy and consolation. The world—that is to say, those who know nothing about this life—say one thing; and all who have experienced it, say quite the contrary. St. Francis de Sales calls this sort of life the sweetness of sweetnesses. St. Ephrem, whilst practicing a most mortified life, cried out, full of consolation, "It is enough, my God, it is enough! Do not load me with Thy benefits. Moderate Thy liberality, if Thou wouldst not have me die, for the ineffable sweetness which I taste in Thy service is enough to cause my death." "I am in a country," says St. Francis Xavier, writing

from Japan to his brethren in Europe, "where I am in want of all the conveniences of life. Nevertheless, I feel so much interior consolation, that there is danger of my losing my sight through weeping with joy." Can so many thousands of Saints, whom we acknowledge to have been so wise and so sincere, have agreed to say exactly opposite to what they thought and experienced?

But if we are so unhappy, as worldly persons think, in this exercise of continual mortification, how is it that those we see to be most mortified are always the most contented? How is it that we find no persons on earth perfectly contented, perfectly happy, but those who are most mortified? If this mortified life does not itself produce this unalterable joy, by what artifice do these persons preserve themselves until death, in a sweetness and tranquility which no misfortune of life can ever disturb? If they merely feign it, how is it that persons of the world, who know so well the art of dissimulation, have never as yet been able to conceal their uneasiness and their regrets, though they pass the greater part of their life in pleasure and amusement? Virtue alone, says St. Augustine, though it seems austere, gives true pleasure. There is no perfect felicity in this world, except for virtuous persons, who seriously labor at their sanctification. Exempt as they are from the disturbance of those cruel passions which tyrannize over the wicked, they experience more sweetness in their life, and less regret. Perfectly submissive to God's will, they enjoy a calm and profound peace which the world cannot give. This sweet tranquility of conscience is the ordinary result of virtue. The more we belong to God, the more do we enjoy it. The more we keep back from God, the less do we participate in this sweetness.

What might we not say of the secret unction by which Almighty God lightens the yoke of His law; of those happy moments in which He makes Himself heard by just souls; of that sweet hope, which makes them feel in anticipation the joys of heaven; of those rays of light, which show them so clearly the vanity of the world; of those tears of consolation,

which they sometimes shed at the foot of the crucifix, when they experience a purer and more exquisite joy than the most delightful pleasures of the world can afford? This joy and this interior sweetness, which surpasses all imagination, is a hidden mystery to tepid souls. It is for them an unknown language. But give me, says St. Augustine, a fervent soul, one truly humble and mortified, a heart full of the love of Jesus Christ; such a one will understand what I say. It is true, that to be perfect, it is not necessary to be altogether insensible to the misfortunes of life. Disasters may cause some agitation to the just, but they do not overpower him. He has always in his virtues a strong rock of support. In the broad way in which the imperfect walk, even though it had no crosses of its own, everything would contribute to raise them up around. Whereas, in the path followed by those who have an ardent love of Jesus Christ, whatever crosses there are, heaven and earth conspire, as it were, to sweeten them. The Son of God Himself carries them with us, to lighten their weight. Finally, the mere thought of death is enough of itself to alarm the happiest worldlings, whereas it serves but to console and rejoice the virtuous. Was there ever anyone at the point of death, at that moment when so correct a judgment is formed of everything, who was sorry for having practiced mortification, or for having led a perfect life? Or rather, is there anyone, on the contrary, who has not felt a deep regret for not having done so?

Perfect mortification must assuredly have charms that we know not, because we are not perfectly mortified. Our weakness lets us do only enough to feel the difficulty, but not enough to taste the sweetness. It seems as though we mistrusted what is told us by the virtuous, and what Jesus Christ Himself promises us. We would have Him pay us in advance. We forget that in this, it is only the first step that is difficult. All the difficulty lies in resolving to mortify ourselves. Taste, says the Prophet, and see. In this matter, the eye is deceived; we must judge by the taste alone. Those who had seen the land of promise only from afar, were frightened, and said that

it devoured its inhabitants. But those who had been there, said quite the contrary, and declared that it was a land flowing with milk and honey. Let us make this perfect sacrifice for a fortnight, at least. A thing must be indeed of little value, if it is not worth the trial. If, after a fortnight of continual and perfect mortification, we do not taste that sweetness which others experience, I am content, said a great servant of God, that it should be said, that the life of those who truly love Jesus Christ is irksome, and that the yoke of Our Lord is heavy.

Is it not strange, that men should require so much to convince them that they can be happy in the exercise of constant mortification, when they see daily so many persons pensive and uneasy amidst the greatest dissipation? If there are sufferings which are unseen, is it impossible that there should be a hidden sweetness? There is such, certainly, and it depends on ourselves to experience it.

Father de la Colombière had made a vow, with the leave of his superiors, to observe all his rules, and he had bound himself in particular to a continual mortification in all things. What will those to whom the three essential vows of religion seem an insupportable burden, think of this great servant of God? Would they not consider him unhappy? But see what he himself has written in his Spiritual Retreats, in which, as is commonly the practice of persons of solid virtue, who are resolved on making constant progress in the way of perfection, he has noted the sentiments given him by God, and the graces which He granted him, in order to remind himself to thank Him for them and to encourage himself to love Him more every day.

"On the sixth day," he says, "making a consideration on the particular vow I have made, I was filled with gratitude to God, who has granted me the grace to make this vow. I had never had time to consider it thoroughly. I felt great joy in seeing myself bound thus by a thousand chains to do the will of God. The thought of this obligation is so far from alarming me, that it fills me with joy. It seems to me, that, in place of

being a slave, I have entered into the kingdom of liberty and peace."

"When I am quite alone," he says elsewhere, "I feel, by the infinite mercy of God, a liberty of heart that causes me incomparable joy. I feel myself attached to nothing, at least at the time. This does not hinder me from feeling every day the emotions of almost all the passions. But a moment's reflection serves to calm them.

"I have often felt great interior joy in the thought that I was in God's service. I have felt that this was worth more than all the favor of kings. The occupations of worldly persons appeared to me most contemptible, compared with what is done for God. I feel myself exalted above all the kings of the earth by the honor of belonging to God.

"I feel continually a greater desire to apply to the observance of my rules. I feel the greatest delight in practicing them. The more exact I am in them, the more I seem to enter into perfect liberty. It is certain that this does not cause me any uneasiness. On the contrary, this yoke makes me, as it were, much lighter. I look on this as the greatest grace I have ever received in my life."

It cannot be doubted that this great servant of God practiced continual mortification in all things after making an express vow to do so. Thus he was seen in his last illness, when his infirmity would allow him to leave his bed, passing many hours of the day on a seat without any kind of support, persevering in this manner until death in the practice of universal mortification. This mortified life filled him with such consolation and so great interior joy that he confesses that it may indeed be felt, but cannot possibly be described.

"The sight of Jesus Christ," he says, "makes the cross so pleasant to me, that it seems as if I could not be happy without it. I look with respect on those whom God visits with humiliations and adversities, of what kind soever they be. They are without doubt His favorites. To humble myself I have only to compare myself with them whilst I am in prosperity."

"The following words," he continues, "never come into my

mind, but light, peace, liberty, meekness, and love enter in, as it seems to me, at the same time with them: 'Simplicity,' 'confidence,' 'humility,' 'self-abandonment,' 'absence of all reserve,' 'the will of God,' 'my Rule.'"

The experience of this great servant of God shows us, that not only have the Saints who have preceded us found so much sweetness in the exercise of universal and constant mortification, but that even those with whom we live experience the same, as soon as they have the generosity to mortify themselves continually.

Chapter VIII

The particular means of acquiring this perfect love of Jesus Christ and this tender devotion to His Sacred Heart

First Means

Prayer

Besides the obstacles that we must avoid, and the dispositions in which we must find ourselves in order to acquire this perfect love of Jesus Christ and this tender devotion to His Sacred Heart, it is well to suggest here the means that are most appropriate for this end.

Now, the first means to obtain this ardent love of Jesus Christ, and this tender devotion to His Sacred Heart, is Prayer. We may well wonder that Christians are not, as it were, all powerful; that they have not all they desire, since they have an infallible means of obtaining all they ask and this means consists only in asking.

There is nothing to which Jesus Christ has so solemnly and so repeatedly bound Himself as to hear our prayers. But of all prayers there can be none more pleasing to Him than that by which we ask Him for His love. He has strictly bound Himself to grant this love to all who should ask Him for it. But we may add, that even if He had not engaged Himself to it, the request itself would oblige Him to it.

Jesus Christ has done all that we can imagine, nay more, to oblige us to love Him. It rests with Him to give us this love. Who will dare believe that He will refuse it to us if we ask Him for it? But our esteem for this love must be indeed small, since we trouble ourselves so little about it, and ask for it so seldom. You wonder that you have not an ardent love for Jesus Christ, though this love is so just and so conformable

to reason. There would be greater reason for astonishment if you did love Him, seeing that this love is the greatest of all His gifts, and that yet you do not even condescend to ask it. Of all the means of obtaining the love of Jesus Christ, there is none more efficacious than prayer. There is none more easy. For who can excuse himself from praying? Still there is none, as it appears, that is more neglected. It might be said, that the most powerful motive by which Jesus Christ seeks to oblige us to make use of this means keeps us from it. Be sure that you will be heard. But, my God, is not this the very thing that is dreaded? "I was afraid that you would hear my prayer too soon" (*The Confessions of St. Augustine*, Book 1). We fear, unhappy as we are, that didst Thou but once hear us, Thy love would induce us to become more virtuous, more recollected, more devout, and more holy than we wish to be. We fear that if we had an ardent love for Thee, we should feel nothing but disgust for all that we have loved, and that we still love. In a word, we seem to fear that we shall not be able to help loving Thee. But regard not, oh my Savior, these sentiments that arise within us, and which we detest as soon as we perceive them. Give us only Thy love with thy grace, and we shall be rich enough. How soon shall we, disgusted with everything else, if, opening to us Thy Sacred Heart, Thou allowest us but once to taste the sweetness that is experienced in loving Thee. Let us pray and often ask for it earnestly and constantly without obtaining it. We fear, perhaps, to be importunate or excessive in our requests, to offend Jesus Christ by our indiscretion or our importunity. But, on the contrary, the reason why we obtain so little from God is because we do not ask much. We are too limited in our desires, and too languid in our prayers. Jesus Christ has given us in the Gospel the parable of the man, who obtained what he asked, merely by his importunity, in order to teach us that, if we wish to obtain what we ask, we must become importunate. We obtain little, because we ask too little, and because we do not beg earnestly for the little we ask for. We must ask Him for nothing less than His love; but it must be a tender, ardent, generous, and perfect love, and we

must ask for it earnestly and with importunity. As He has so solemnly engaged Himself to refuse us nothing that we ask in His Name, He cannot refuse to hear us without breaking His promise. Most frequently we do not know what we ask. But we should do an injury to Jesus Christ, and falsify our own belief, if, when we ask Him for His love, we were to doubt His hearing us, more especially if we ask it with earnestness and sincerity. I believe, indeed, that Jesus Christ, to punish us, or to humble us, and in any case to increase our merit, will leave us certain defects and imperfections, from which we entreat Him to deliver us. But no one will ever persuade me that, after we have asked Him sincerely and earnestly for an ardent love of Him, He will refuse it to us. On the contrary, He will grant us more than we asked. Thou hast brought this divine fire on earth, oh Lord, and what dost Thou desire but that it be enkindled? (Luke 12:49). With whom does it rest wholly to inflame me with it? Give me, then, if it please Thee, give me Thy love, oh Lord. This shall be in future my constant prayer. I will make it morning and night, when at rest and when at work. I will make it every hour, and will never cease to say: Give me but Thy love, oh Lord, with Thy grace, and I am rich enough; I ask no more.

Second Means

Frequent Communion

The second means is the frequent use of the Sacraments, and frequent Communion. It is enough to know what Holy Communion is, to understand that there is no more certain means of becoming inflamed with love for Jesus Christ than to communicate frequently. It is not possible to carry fire in one's bosom, and not be set on fire by it. Divine love has enkindled a furnace, so to speak, on our altars in the adorable Eucharist. It is by approaching to this sacred fire that all the Saints have been inflamed with a most ardent and tender love for Jesus Christ. The love which burned within them

after Communion appeared even in their countenance. How often have they been forced, in the depth of winter, to seek the cool air in order to moderate the ardor of divine love? The name or the picture of Jesus Christ was enough to make them fall into raptures and ecstasies. It cannot be doubted that the great love which the first faithful had for Jesus Christ was the effect of Holy Communion, which they received daily. All who render themselves worthy, by the innocence of their life and the exercise of true piety, to communicate frequently, experience still every day, in this point, the admirable effects of frequent Communion. They love Jesus Christ more and more. Their love increases in proportion as they nourish themselves more frequently with this Bread of Angels. So far are they from becoming disgusted with the frequent use of it, that, on the contrary, their hunger sensibly increases as the love they have for Jesus Christ grows more ardent.

All the other Sacraments are effects of the love which the Son of God has for men. There is not one that is not capable of instilling into our hearts a true love for our divine Savior. But the Sacrament of the altar, says St. Bernard, is the love of loves. It is the effect of the greatest love, that Jesus Christ can have for man; and at the same time, the most fruitful source of the tender and ardent love that men ought to have for Jesus Christ. Everything in this mystery contributes to inspire and increase this ardent love: the gift, the manner of giving it and the end for which it is given. Jesus Christ gives us therein His adorable Body and His precious Blood, to be our food. What shall have power to light up this divine fire in the hearts of men, if this heavenly food cannot do it? But the loving manner in which Jesus Christ makes us this gift obliges us less powerfully to love Him. Our Divine Savior, the expected of the people of Israel, the desired of nations, the desire of the eternal hills, allowed His coming into the world to be wished for, for so many thousand years. But here He Himself asks men, entreats of them, and even does violence to them to make them receive Him. Oblige them, says He, in the Gospel, oblige them to partake of the banquet that I

have prepared for them. Love is impatient. It is an enemy of delay. It does not know what it is to hesitate or to be cautious. What has our loving Savior in view, in so much earnestness? He desires to be loved by men. He gives them His Body and Blood to gain their hearts. He makes Himself their food only to gain possession of their heart, to rob them of it, without their being able, so to speak, to prevent it. The chief intention you should have in communicating, says St. Francis de Sales (*Introduction to a Devout Life*, Part 2, Chap. 2), should be to increase and strengthen yourself in the love of God, for you ought to receive through love what love alone gives you. "Nowhere," continues this great Saint, is our Savior more loving or more tender than here. He here annihilates Himself, as it were, and becomes our food, in order to regenerate our souls by uniting us most closely to Himself.

We look with admiration on the fervor of those pure souls, who never approach the altars without feeling a sensible increase of love for Jesus Christ and being wholly inflamed with it.* But is it not far more extraordinary that—Communions being so frequent—these marvels are of so rare an occurrence. Your sins, your relapses, your weaknesses, give you uneasiness. You wish to correct yourself, to overcome that repugnance, that tepidity, to break that link which is the only thing that keeps you back in the path of piety. You wish to have an ardent love for Jesus Christ. You acknowledge that only those who love Him perfectly are perfectly happy; and, yet, after so very many Communions, you are still so imperfect, so tepid, and you have no greater love for Jesus Christ.

For a year, for ten years perhaps, you have said Mass every day. You have received the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ more than three thousand times in your life; and yet, for a year, for ten years, you have been fighting against some imagination, some fancy, you say, which hinders you from belonging entirely to God, and from tasting that peace and sweetness which are enjoyed in His service. Perhaps even your love for Jesus Christ is less. "Ah! my God," exclaimed a

* *This extraordinary ardor of divine love is marvelous only because it is so rare.*

great servant of God, "are they heretics or infidels that speak thus "(Father de la Colombière, *Réflexions Chrétiennes*). How is it possible that a Christian who feeds so often on the Body of Jesus Christ should desire anything in vain? Who will ever believe that a God, offered as the price of the graces that are sought, will not be able to obtain them? That Jesus Christ, who has instituted this mystery only in order that He may be loved, will refuse His love to those to whom He gives Himself without reserve or restriction! If, then, unhappily we find that by communicating every week, or even oftener, or by celebrating Mass daily, we derive no profit from this adorable Sacrament, we do not amend, we misuse Holy Communion, we do not love Jesus Christ more, we always feel the same tepidity and weaknesses, are we therefore to leave off Communion? Must we give up saying Mass daily? No. But we must regulate our life and free ourselves from the vices and failings that hinder us from profiting by it. The evil does not spring from communicating too frequently, but from communicating ill. Suppose that no sort of food did you good, because you took it when you should not, what would you do in such a case? Would you abstain altogether from eating, or would you adopt every necessary precaution in order to derive benefit from what you eat? Suppose that someone formed the extraordinary resolution of preventing the food which he took at his meals from digesting in his stomach. He falls ill; the physicians are consulted. Will any one of them advise that the sick man take no more food? He must eat; but he must do it with the necessary precautions. He must be less indiscreet and imprudent. If he did not eat, the food would not indeed corrupt in his stomach, it is true; but he would die of weakness. This imprudent and culpable resolution would not hinder digestion, but it would soon exhaust the remains of his strength, and you would soon see him fall in the course of twenty-four hours into a mortal weakness. He would not die of indigestion, but of hunger. In a word, it would be folly to take from him what supports his life, in order to deliver him from what makes him ill. It is easy

to apply this example to those who do not draw any profit from Communion. These persons have great reason to fear that they are ill-directed, that their conscience is in a bad state, that their faith is too weak, and that their confessions are without sincerity, without sorrow, or without resolution of amendment. If you are ill-disposed, correct yourself at once, in order that you may communicate often. If you are imperfect, communicate often, in order that you may amend. The Son of God calls this adorable mystery our *daily* bread, to show what frequent use we should make of it. He calls the poor and the blind to His banquet, in order to teach us that, however poor we may be, and whatever infirmities we labor under, if we be still living, we must have no difficulty in eating this bread of life.

The little fruit that the greater number of persons, especially priests, draw from frequent Communion, gives rise sometimes to a doubt, whether it be advisable to communicate so frequently. But this doubt cannot be better answered than by quoting here what St. Francis de Sales has said on this subject.

"I do not wish," says the Saint (*Introduction to a Devout Life*. Part 2, Chap. 20), "either to blame or to praise those who, not being priests, communicate every day. But I advise all, and exhort them as earnestly as I can, to communicate every eight days, provided they have no affection to sin." These are the very words of St. Augustine, he continues. He neither praises nor blames absolutely those who communicate every day, but leaves the matter to the prudence of the director. For as the disposition necessary for communicating so frequently is so very rare, it is not well to advise it generally. But inasmuch as this disposition, however rare, may be found in many persons of solid virtue, it is not well on the other hand to forbid it generally to all.

As it would be imprudence to recommend so frequent a use of the Holy Eucharist to all indifferently, so it would be no less imprudence to blame those who make frequent use of it, by the advice of a wise director. The answer of St. Catherine of Siena, on this subject, is to the purpose. You tell me that I ought

not to communicate so often, because St. Augustine neither praises nor blames those who do so every day. Since St. Augustine, she answers, does not blame it, do not do so yourself. You see Philothea, that St. Augustine exhorts and strongly recommends to communicate every Sunday. Do so then, as far as you can. For since, as I suppose, you have no affection either to mortal or venial sin, you have the disposition required by St. Augustine. Nay, you have more; for not only have you no affection for sinning, but you have no affection for sin. You should therefore communicate every Sunday, and even oftener, if your spiritual Father judge it proper.

If worldly persons, adds the Saint, in the following chapter (Ibid. Part 2, Chap. 21) should ask you why you communicate so frequently, tell them it is to learn to love God, to purify yourself from your imperfections, to free yourself from your miseries, to console yourself in your afflictions, to gain strength in your weaknesses. Tell them that two kinds of persons should communicate frequently: the perfect, because being well disposed, they would do wrong not to approach the source of perfection and sanctity, and the imperfect, in order that they may amend and become perfect; the strong, that they may not become weak, and the weak that they may become strong; the sick in order that they may be cured, and those who are well that they may not become ill. That, as regards yourself, as you are imperfect, weak and infirm, you require frequently to communicate with Him who is your perfection, your strength, your medicine. Tell them, that persons in the world who have not much to do, should do so no less frequently, because they need greater helps, and that those who labor much and undergo great fatigue, should take solid food and eat frequently. Tell them that you communicate often in order to learn to do it well, for what we seldom do, we never do well.

Communicate often, Philothea, and as often as you can with the advice of your director. Hares become white in our mountains during winter, from seeing and eating nothing but snow. So, by adoring and receiving Him Who is beauty,

goodness, and purity Itself, in this august Sacrament, you will be insensibly purified from your sins, and become better and more pure every day.

This is the advice St. Francis de Sales gives to all those who have a horror for every kind of mortal sin and a real desire of securing their salvation. It is true that the desire to communicate is ordinarily found in all who have a lively faith and who really love Jesus Christ; and, on the contrary, we too often experience that in proportion as we mix with the world, and as the love of Jesus Christ grows cold within us, we feel the greater difficulty in communicating. It is superfluous, therefore, to preach to the wicked, that they must abstain from Communion. They are too ready to do it of themselves. We never find that souls, corrupted by vice and immersed in it, hunger after this heavenly food, which forms the delight of pure souls and of all who love Jesus Christ.

Third Means

Visits to the Blessed Sacrament

The third means is often to visit the Blessed Sacrament. Friendship is kept up and increased among men by visits and frequent conversations. It is by this means, also, that we shall continually increase in an ardent love for Jesus Christ. As He dwells on our altars in order that He may be constantly with us, what must be His sentiments regarding those whom He rarely sees in His presence. It seems as if nothing gained His Heart more completely than these frequent adorations and visits. It is at these times that He usually bestows His gifts in greater abundance, and it may be said, that of all the favors He then grants, the most ordinary is the grace of His love.

There are visits of civility, and there are visits also of pure friendship. To fail in the first would be a fault, but it is only during the latter that His special favors are usually granted. The greater feasts, the time of Mass and of Divine office, are in respect of Jesus Christ the same thing as visits of duty and

civility to great persons. We should be noticed, or even punished, if we were not there with the crowd. But the visits that are made at certain hours of the day, at which Jesus Christ is not generally visited, but, on the contrary, forgotten by the greater number, are visits of friendship. It is at this time, more than any other, that Jesus Christ converses familiarly, so to speak, with His favorites, and He showers upon them the treasures of His graces and inflames them with His love. Whether it be that the indifference of those who then forget Him, renders the fidelity of those who visit Him more precious, all the Saints have experienced that there is no more infallible means of soon obtaining a great love of Jesus Christ, than frequently to visit Him in the churches, particularly at certain hours of the day when He is so little honored and so rarely visited. We will here only observe, that when we make these visits in such a manner as if we really believed that it is Jesus Christ Whom we are visiting, they are an infallible means of obtaining, in a short time, a perfect love for Jesus Christ.

Fourth Means

Fidelity in accomplishing with exactness some practices of this devotion

The fourth means is fidelity in accomplishing with exactness some little practices which Jesus Christ has declared to be very pleasing to Him, and well suited to honor His Sacred Heart, and inflame us, in a short time, with an ardent love of Him. These practices consist in some visits to the Blessed Sacrament, certain prayers, and some Communions, more frequent and more devout.

There are some persons who, from a false idea of virtue, treat as frivolous all practices of devotion that seem to them too easy, and have little esteem for whatever does not give them an opportunity of distinguishing themselves. Such persons will not feel much fervor, perhaps, in regard of these practices, because they contain nothing striking or very ex-

traordinary. They will imagine, that what everyone can do, cannot be so very effectual a means of becoming what in effect few are. But, without examining here the true cause of this illusion, might we not make them the same answer which was made to Naaman, whose ideas were somewhat similar to these? Even though something very difficult were proposed to you in order to obtain so great a grace, you ought not to refuse to do it. With how much greater reason, then, ought you to try the efficacy of the means proposed to you, since it costs you so little.

It is necessary, indeed, that there should be perseverance and exactness in perfectly accomplishing what is enjoined in these little practices. This fidelity is usually what is most grateful to God and most meritorious in any devotional exercises. It is always the least suspicious sign of sincere love. It would be much better to do less and to be more constant. Our good works are perfect in proportion as they are less accompanied by self-will. Now, those who continually change their practices of devotion, or the time of these practices, are certainly persons who act only by the movement of their own will. For what other motive can they have in making these changes?

In perseverance, then, properly consists that generous fidelity which is the most certain proof of a great love for Jesus Christ. If we consider seriously what we do for God, we shall see, that however great may be our labor, we do but very little. In another sense, however, it may he truly said, that it is no little matter to persevere steadily, without taking notice of the disposition we happen to be in, or of our feelings at the time, or of numberless other specious pretexts which present themselves every day, and which our natural inconsistency represents to us as lawful reasons for changing, or at least interrupting, our practices of devotion. To be always constant, whether we be sad or joyous, in tranquility or fatigued, in peace or in a tumult, and to fulfill steadily for Jesus Christ certain obligations which the love and gratitude we wish to show Him impose on us, is to be truly faithful to Him, and to have a true love for Jesus Christ.

Fifth Means

A tender devotion towards the Blessed Virgin

The fifth means for gaining quickly an ardent love for Jesus Christ is to have a tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin, who has so absolute a power over the Sacred Heart of her Son. It cannot be doubted but that the Blessed Virgin is of all creatures the one who has had the greatest love for Jesus Christ, has been most loved by Him, and has had also the most ardent desire that He should be perfectly loved. She is the Mother of perfect love (Eccles. 24:24). To her we must have recourse, if we would be inflamed with it. The Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary are too much alike, and too closely united, for it to be possible that we should have an entrance into one and not gain an entrance into the other; with this difference, however, that the Heart of Jesus admits only souls of the greatest purity, whereas the Heart of Mary purifies such as are not so by the graces which she obtains for them, and makes them fit to be received into the Heart of Jesus.

Though all the other means of acquiring an ardent love of Jesus Christ are easy and efficacious, this appears the easiest for many. Few have all the dispositions necessary for being inflamed with divine love. But there are few who cannot very easily obtain them by means of the Blessed Virgin. Sinners even ought not to despair. Mary is the hope of sinners; Mary is the refuge of all the miserable. She is the bulwark of help for all. Jesus Christ easily grants to her what we are unworthy to receive, says St. Bernard. He has established her as the dispensatrix of His graces, and has resolved to grant none that should not pass through her hands. Let us have a tender love for the Mother, and we shall soon be inflamed with an ardent love for the Son. It is a mark that we do not desire the love of the Son, when we do not feel a great tenderness for the Mother. Without this great tenderness for the Blessed Virgin, we can never hope to have an entrance into the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ. It has been observed that there has never been

any one, who felt only indifference for the Blessed Virgin, who had not at the same time an aversion for Jesus Christ. Indeed, it is from the aversion such persons have for Jesus Christ, that their indifference and aversion for the Blessed Virgin arises. "*He that hateth Me, hateth My Father also*," said the Son of God. For the same reason it may be said, that there never was a heretic in the world that was not an enemy of the Blessed Virgin, because there has never been one that has not hated Jesus Christ. All the works composed by them tend no less to extinguish the love of the Mother than that of the Son. There has never been one of these secret enemies of Jesus Christ, occupied as they are in destroying the means most suited to make us love Him, who has inspired us with devotion towards the Blessed Virgin, or rather who has not sought, by every possible means, to extinguish in the hearts of the faithful so just and so solid a devotion.

This has been remarked by one of the most zealous and distinguished prelates of these times, the illustrious Archbishop of Malines, in his admirable Pastoral Letter, on which Pope Innocent XII has pronounced so high an eulogium, in the Brief which he wrote to this Prelate. This Pastoral Letter is full of the spirit and zeal which animated St. Charles Borromeo and St. Francis de Sales. It will rank as a masterpiece of this style of writing, whether we consider the beautiful instructions it contains, the sound morality which pervades it, or the solidity of the doctrine which it inculcates. Let us hear in what terms this great Prelate expresses himself, regarding the false zeal of those who, so far from urging all the faithful to devotion towards the Blessed Virgin, seem even to do all in their power to discredit it.

"It scandalizes Catholics," he says, "in the highest degree, to perceive that discredit is covertly thrown upon the devotion which they have imbibed with their mother's milk, and which has been so frequently and so earnestly recommended to them by those who have had the care of their instruction. It scandalizes them to see that images are no longer valued; that pilgrimages of devotion are made a jest of, and that the

insipid and unchristian jests of Erasmus are used for this purpose; that in private conversations, and even in anonymous libels, the Sodalities instituted in honor of the Blessed Virgin are decried, whilst all who are faithful to the pious and holy practices of their forefathers are taking up their defense, and desire that they should be again now, as in the time of their ancestors, the mark by which a Catholic is recognized and distinguished from a heretic."

And elsewhere, "We recommend earnestly to all," he says, "devotion towards the Blessed Virgin. We desire that you employ your efforts to increase this devotion and make it flourish more and more amongst the Faithful; that her pictures be visited with devotion, especially those at which miracles are wrought; that they be carried in procession, as is customary; that wax candles be lighted, Hymns and Litanies sung, and devotions performed before her statues; that congregations and confraternities erected in her honor be spoken of with respect, as also the privileges and immunities granted by the Pontiffs to them; that those who are not yet admitted be invited to join them; that they be instituted in places where they do not exist, and reestablished where they have been abolished; that it be known, that to injure any one of these objects is to wound us most deeply; how much more to censure or destroy them.

"We inherit from our ancestors these tender sentiments of piety towards the Blessed Virgin. In spite of the rage of the heretics who surround us, we have happily preserved them. I desire with all my heart, that they should strike root more and more deeply in the hearts of the faithful. We feel urged to this by the advice and example of many holy personages, whom it is not necessary to particularize here. We may say, that all who have distinguished themselves in past ages by extraordinary sanctity, have given, in their lives, manifest marks of this devotion towards the Blessed Virgin.

"Nor need we in this matter give ear to the vain scruples of heretics, and other enemies of Mary's honor, who pretend that the respect shown to the Mother wounds the rights of

the Son. The faithful are not so ill-instructed, as not to know what they owe to the Son, and that it is only in consideration of Him that honor is shown to the Mother. All agree, that it is for the love of the Son that we honor the Mother, or rather, that in the Mother we honor the Son, who, on His part, will visit with rigorous vengeance all that wounds the honor of His Mother. The Saints often tell us this, and the deplorable fall of some Christians clearly proves it to us. No sooner does a Christian relax in devotion towards the Mother, than devotion towards the Son insensibly decays, and becomes at last wholly extinct.

"The zeal of St. Charles Borromeo in extending the devotion to the Blessed Virgin, the decrees he has made in her honor, are seen in the various Councils held under his authority at Milan. Both his addresses to these Councils and the statutes drawn up in them have become enduring monuments, in which his words clearly manifest his ardent affection towards the Queen of Heaven.

"The works of the holy Bishop of Geneva are full of the same sentiments; and his life is replete with actions that attest the same devotion. He glories, in one place, that he belongs, as did almost the whole city, to the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary. I say nothing of St. Anselm, of St. Bernard, of St. Norbert. Let Pastors take these Saints as their models, and propose them to their flocks as excellent examples for imitation..."

It is rare indeed to meet with persons wanting in tenderness for the Blessed Virgin, and in an inclination towards that love which we should have for Mary, and that singular veneration which we owe her. We may say, that devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary is universal in our days. It is certain that devotion to the Mother will never be disparaged, but by the enemies of her Son. As for us, who desire to love her Son most ardently, we will neglect nothing that will help us to love the Mother tenderly; and let us be convinced that it is only by means of the Mother that we can find easy access to Jesus Christ and be received into His Sacred Heart.

For the same reason, we ought also to have a special devotion towards the Holy Family. For, Our Lady and St. Joseph loved Jesus Christ more ardently and more tenderly than others they may be of greater use to us in obtaining for us this love of tenderness, and procuring for us an entrance into that Sacred Heart, over which they exercise so great an authority.

Sixth Means

A special devotion to St. Aloysius Gonzaga

The sixth means that we propose, and which Almighty God has already shown, by evident marks, to be most useful in obtaining a tender love for Our Lord Jesus Christ, is devotion to St. Aloysius Gonzaga of the Society of Jesus; more illustrious still for his innocence and the sublime perfection of his life, than for the conspicuous position which his rank in the world had given him.

It is certain, that in heaven the Saints interest themselves greatly for all those who love and specially honor them on earth. The most ordinary grace which they obtain for them is the virtue in which they themselves have excelled and which was in some degree their characteristic. This is what our Saint used to say, as was found written after his death:—"As men on earth are naturally more inclined to oblige those who have the same inclinations with themselves, so, in Heaven, the Blessed, who have excelled in some particular virtue, are pleased to employ their credit with God, in favor of those who have a particular attraction for the same virtue, and who labor in earnest to acquire it..."

Now, as the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, in the exercise of an interior life and continual union with God, was the distinguishing characteristic of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, it cannot be doubted but that he interests himself in a particular manner for those who have this devotion greatly at heart. Many persons have happily experienced the powerful effects of his intercession in this point. It might be said, that

no one can be truly devout to him, without feeling at once a real tenderness for Jesus Christ. Devotion to him inspires a high esteem and love for the interior life. There seem to be few Saints whom we can propose more universally than St. Aloysius, to all sorts of persons, as a model for attaining easily, in the exercise of an ordinary life, solid and exalted virtue. To judge of his actions, we find nothing, so far as the exterior is concerned, extraordinary in his life. He died young and never held any high office. Nor did he distinguish himself by any wonderful actions, but, on the contrary, he was extremely careful to remain hidden. Nevertheless, the sublime degree of glory to which he is raised, can be nothing but the reward of great merit; and this great merit can only be the fruit of extreme purity of heart, an interior life, living continually in the presence of God, a most tender and ardent love of Jesus Christ—in fine, of a consummate perfection, which he acquired in a few years, by the excessive love and tender devotion which he always had towards Jesus Christ in the most Blessed Sacrament. Nor was it without a special providence of God, that this faithful servant of Jesus Christ died as he had predicted and desired, on the day which is appointed for the Feast of the Sacred Heart, to which he had always been so devout. It was in this adorable Heart, so to speak, that he received, from his childhood, the grace of most sublime contemplation and a continual gift of tears. So abundant were these tears, especially at Mass, immediately after the Consecration, that his garments were all wet with them. From the same source sprung the extreme tranquility of heart, which he preserved unaltered amidst all the events and all the occupations of his life. Finally, from this Sacred Heart, says the historian of his life, his soul was filled with such ardor and such sweet consolation, that his countenance appeared all on fire, and his heart palpitated so excessively, that it seemed as if it would burst from its place. Here he united himself so intimately with God, that, when he was obliged for any reason to distract himself from this union, his heart felt a pain like that which is felt when a limb of the body

is dislocated, as he himself attested. "I do not know how it is," he would sometimes say, "I am forbidden to apply my mind to God, lest this application should injure my head. But the effort I make not to apply, does me more harm than the application itself. For it has become a habit with me, and I find it no longer a labor, but sweetness and repose. I will, however, try to obey in the best manner I can." But, to form some idea of the sublime degree of glory which he enjoys in Heaven, and which we may consider to be the fruit of his interior life, and of his most ardent and tender love for the adorable Heart of Jesus Christ, it is enough to read what St. Mary Magdalen de' Pazzi has said of it. Hear what is related by the author of the life of this Saint.

"In the year 1600, on the 4th of April, the Saint, being in one of her accustomed raptures, saw in Heaven the glory of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, of the Society of Jesus, and surprised at the extraordinary sight, she began to speak, pausing between her words from time to time. 'O how great is the glory of Aloysius, the son of Ignatius! I could never have believed it, if Our Lord had not shown it to me. It seems to me that there can be no glory in Heaven like that of Aloysius. I say it again, Aloysius is a great Saint. We have many Saints in the Church, whom I do not believe to be as exalted. Would that I could go over the whole world, to say that Aloysius, son of Ignatius, is a great Saint; and would that I could show the glory he enjoys, that God Himself might be glorified thereby. He is raised to this high degree of glory, because he led an interior life. Who can express the price and value of an interior life? There is no comparison between the interior and the exterior. All the time Aloysius was upon earth, he had his eyes fixed on the Divine Word. Aloysius was a hidden martyr. For whoever knows Thee, oh my God, knows Thee to be so great and so amiable, that it is a great martyrdom to see that he does not love Thee, and that Thou art so far from being loved by creatures, that Thou art even offended by them. He was also a Martyr, because he knew well how to suffer. Oh how Aloysius loved upon earth! It is for this that he now enjoys

God in Heaven with so great a plenitude of love. Whilst he was in this mortal life, he continually shot forth darts of love into the Heart of the Eternal Word. Now that he is in Heaven, these darts return into his own heart, and remain fixed there; for the acts of love and charity, which he then made, caused him extreme delight.'" Such are the Saint's own words.

It is easy to recognize in this description, the exact portrait of one, truly and perfectly devout to the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ. Those who sincerely desire to become so, and to obtain a love of tenderness for Jesus Christ, and the gift of an interior life, and of living continually in the presence of God, should have a tender devotion to this great Saint. He will make them soon feel the sweet effects of his intercession with Jesus and Mary, whom he loved with so much ardor and tenderness, and by Whom he was so tenderly loved.

On this account the Nuns of the Convent of the Angels at Florence, besides a daily devotion to this great Saint, celebrate his feast annually in their Convent, in the most solemn manner, to obtain by his intercession this interior recollection, continual union with God, most ardent and tender love of Jesus Christ, and perfect devotion to His Sacred Heart.

Seventh Means

A Day of Retreat every month

The seventh and last means for acquiring and preserving this ardent love of Jesus Christ is so useful and necessary, that we may say that without it, all the others which have been proposed are but of little avail. However sincere may be our will to have an ardent love for Jesus Christ, we require to renew from time to time the reflections from which it took its rise. There is not a more suitable means for renewing, from time to time, these salutary reflections, and with them the fervor that is their ordinary fruit, than by making a day's Retreat every month. For this purpose it is not necessary that we should seek solitude elsewhere than in our own house. We

may even make this retreat without interrupting our ordinary business, or omitting the smallest obligations of our state. All that is required is that we withdraw ourselves, for a day, from some kind of amusement, from some unnecessary visit, in order to examine whether we have relaxed in the practice of virtue, whether we fulfill with punctuality the least duties of our state, whether we have more love and gratitude towards Jesus Christ, whether we make any progress in virtue, and what fruit we draw from the use of the Sacraments.

The manner of making this Retreat will be found in the book we have referred to above. Meditations for each month on the most important truths of faith are given there at length, with the considerations that may be made each day. It seems to me there cannot be a more effectual means for continually advancing in virtue. One day in the month is all that is required. We are at liberty to choose whatever day is most convenient. We must indeed have but little love for Jesus Christ, if we refuse to consecrate to Him at least one day in each month.

FR. JOHN CROISET, S.J.

Seventeenth century France was wracked with the heresy of Jansenism, one of the effects being that very few Catholics at that time frequented Holy Communion. It was at the height of this heresy that Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque was favored with the apparitions of Our Lord at Paray-le-Monial.

From 1647-1690, Fr. John Croiset, S.J., served as spiritual director to the quiet nun to whom Our Lord Jesus Christ chose to reveal His Sacred Heart. It was in this capacity that he composed a volume entitled *The Devotion to the Sacred Heart* published in 1691. Saint Margaret Mary revealed to Father Croiset that it was Our Lord Himself who had inspired him with the ideas in this book and that it was so pleasing to Him, that "none other but Himself could have arranged everything so much to His wishes."

This book comes from the pen of a man intimately familiar with every aspect of the revelations of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to Saint Margaret Mary; thus, this book is actually the "key" to understanding the importance and the centrality of the devotion to the Sacred Heart for our lives as true Catholics.

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